

THIS LAW OF OURS

AND OTHER ESSAYS



MUHAMMAD ASAD

REVISED EDITION

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THE MESSAGE OF THE QUR'ĀN
THE ROAD TO MECCA
ISLAM AT THE CROSSROADS
ṢAḤĪḤ AL-BUKHĀRĪ: THE EARLY YEARS
OF ISLAM
THE PRINCIPLES OF STATE
AND GOVERNMENT IN ISLAM

THIS LAW OF OURS

And Other Essays

By
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FOREWORD

WHEN, on the first day of November 1952, I moved into my husband's apartment in New York and began my new life with that extraordinary man, I learned, almost immediately, of his primary fault, which he has carried with him from his cradle and will probably carry to the grave: a total lack of vanity. Now, vanity is considered to be a fault—and when taken to the extreme, even a sin—in our Muslim religion as well as in most of the other great religions of the world; and so you may well ask, "How can you criticise the man you married, and with whom you have collaborated in his work throughout all the thirty-three years of your life with him, and whose religion and points of view you share both intellectually and emotionally: how can you criticise him for possessing a quality in which you should take pride?" And my well-thought-out answer is this, albeit an unconventional one: I am convinced through my experiences of people and of life itself that one is almost invariably taken at one's own valuation, so to speak, and thus the man of vanity is usually taken much more seriously than the man without it: simply because normal, unthinking people do take a person at his face value. And in a writer, in particular, this virtue might be a fault.

My very first experience in this regard was this. Only a week after our marriage, my new husband, Muhammad Asad, was requested by Dr. Schuyler Wallace, Director, I believe, of something called "The School of Oriental Affairs" (I do not remember the exact title) in New York, to give a long talk about Islam and the then-current problems of the Middle East and the Muslim world in general, and afterwards to answer the avid (or so he hoped) questions of the audience, comprised mostly of post-graduate students of international affairs.

The day before, I shyly broached the question of my husband's text, or at least an outline of his text, and my strange new life-mate's response was, "It is almost ready." I spent the whole day in this—my first witnessing of a public address by my husband—nervously awaiting some "news". Five minutes before leaving our apartment, he suddenly jotted down a few handwritten notes on a small filing card and told me that that was it.

And so we arrived at the packed audience hall and I took my seat in the front row, not out of self-importance but because my husband insisted that he always liked to have a single face before him to whom he could directly address his words, and mine—as his wife and companion—seemed to him to be the most appropriate one. Dr. Wallace opened the meeting and then turned it over to Muhammad Asad, who forthwith spoke enthusiastically and cogently to his very sophisticated audience, and even forgot to refer to his so-called "notes". The talk was received with ovation and, even more importantly, followed by a series of very intelligent questions; and many pleasant and stimulating hours passed away.

This is not in itself an important anecdote, but only my explanation of why I personally consider my husband's total lack of vanity a fault. Naturally, he left no written "script" nor even a tape-recording of this and so many other talks made before live, radio and television audiences. This was the habit of his life.

An almost identical situation occurred in 1959 or 1960, when my husband was invited to address The Royal Institute of International Affairs in London, chaired by Sir Arnold Toynbee, on the principles underlying the idea of an Islamic State. And, unfortunately, this time I was not able to accompany him from Geneva, where we were then living, to London, and so I haven't a notion of what he said, although I did receive echoes of it from the great Sir Arnold's, as well as others', appreciation of it. And so on *ad infinitum*.

Fortunately, I eventually went through some of his old papers and unearthed what I believe to be valuable contributions to Muslim religious and political thought, but the greater part of them had simply been discarded by him. What I have managed to salvage I am presenting herewith, in book form, "for the record", as a kind of sample of the consistency of this unusual Muslim's views down the years. And I would request the reader to take note—before and after reading each of these essays—of the *date* and *year* when they

were written or spoken—and then to consider them against the time in which they are now being published. I believe that he and she will be struck, as I have been, not only by the extraordinary timeliness and timelessness of these thoughts and predictions, but also by their great consistency. In fact, they constitute something like a "profile" of the intellectual "face" of Muhammad Asad over more than forty years of his long life. And I would like to share it with my Muslim brethren wherever they may be.

Lisbon, 1986

POLA HAMIDA ASAD

NOTE: All the passages of the Holy Qur'an quoted in this book are taken from Muhammad Asad's work, *The Message of the Qur'an*, published by Dar al-Andalus, Gibraltar.

THIS LAW OF OURS

AUTHOR'S NOTE

THE THESIS propounded on these pages is based on several essays published in Lahore between September 1946 and February 1947. They appeared in the periodical *Arafat*, which I wrote and edited in those days as a "one-man's journal". As was evident from its subtitle, "A Monthly Critique of Muslim Thought", *Arafat* was a kind of journalistic monologue meant to clarify—as much as might be possible for a single man—the great confusion prevailing in the Muslim community as to the scope and the practical implications of Islamic Law.

The first impetus towards such a "monologue" came to me during the Second World War, when—because of my then Austrian citizenship—I found myself an involuntary "guest" of the Government of India from September 1, 1939, to August 14, 1945. Throughout those years I was the only Muslim in an internment camp peopled by some three thousand Germans, Austrians and Italians—both Nazis and anti-Nazis as well as Fascists and anti-Fascists—all of them collected helter-skelter from all over Asia and indiscriminately locked up behind barbed wire as "enemy aliens"; and the fact that I was the only Muslim among so many non-Muslims contributed, if anything, to the intensity of my preoccupation with the cultural and intellectual problems of my community and the spiritual environment which I had chosen for myself as early as 1926.

The perplexity and the cultural chaos in which the Muslims were floundering in those days were ever-present in my mind. Thinking about the cause—or the causes—of that confusion became almost an obsession with me. I can still see myself pacing day-in and day-out over the great length of our barrack-room, trying to figure out why a community which had been granted a splendid spiritual guidance through the Qur'an and the life-example of the Last Prophet had for centuries failed to arrive at a clear, unambiguously agreed-

upon concept of the Law through which that guidance could be brought to practical fruition. And one day, suddenly, an answer to this tormenting question presented itself to me: the Muslims did not and could not apply the Law of Islam to the real problems of their communal and individual lives because that Law had been obscured to them—and, therefore, made impracticable—by centuries of juristic speculation and diversification. And it struck me forcibly that unless that tremendous complication could somehow be resolved and Islamic Law brought back to its erstwhile clarity and simplicity, the Muslims were condemned endlessly to blunder along through a maze of conflicting concepts as to what that Law really is and what it demands of its followers.

At that time I had never yet read any of the writings of that outstanding Islamic thinker, Abū 'Alī ibn Ḥazm of Cordoba; but the conclusions at which I arrived spontaneously and independently proved, many months after my release from internment and after a study of Ibn Ḥazm's works, very close to—although not always identical with—the fundamental ideas of this great predecessor. To be sure, not all of his *fiqhī* conclusions could or should be accepted at their face value: some of them are an outcome of a dogmatic literalism which does not recommend itself without reservation to minds that seek to comprehend the spiritual and not only the legal purport of the *sharī'ah*. None the less, Ibn Ḥazm ranks very high indeed among the small group of those profound thinkers of our past who stood up boldly against mere convention in their endeavours to free the eternal Law of Islam of all that goes beyond the self-evident ordinances of the Qur'ān and the Sunnah of the Prophet, upon whom be God's blessings and peace.

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As I have mentioned at the outset, the thoughts underlying this essay were first conceived by me some forty years ago. It seems to me, however, that despite all the changes which have come about in the meantime, these thoughts are even more relevant to our present social and cultural situation than they were in that comparatively distant past.

We are now witnessing a strong resurgence, in all Muslim lands and throughout all social layers of the community, of a consciousness of our past greatness as well as of our failings, coupled with a deep longing for a re-establishment of Islam as the basic factor in

our lives. In some countries—pre-eminently in Pakistan—a sincere, planned effort is being made in the right direction: a re-introduction of the system of *zakāh* and *'ushr*, a reform of banking methods free of the drawback of *ribā* as a pre-condition of a future return to an Islamic scheme of economics, and so forth—and all this with an absence of the fanaticism and lack of moderation unfortunately prevalent in the two or three other countries which have embarked on the long journey towards a truly Islamic state of things.

But even if we take the praiseworthy example of Pakistan into account, we find that, on the whole, the emotional upheaval which is so characteristic of the present-day Muslim world is as yet completely incoherent and confused. There is no unanimity as to the kind of spiritual, social and—more than anything else—political future at which we ought to aim. To *desire* a return to an Islamic reality is one thing; but to *visualise* that reality in all its concrete aspects is another. Mere slogans will not help us in our dilemma. The dream of an Islamic “revolution” (a Western concept artificially implanted in Muslim minds) can only lead to an exacerbation of the many existing conflicts within our *ummah*, and thus to a deepening of the chaos in which we now find ourselves. And the same goes for the assertion that this or that Muslim country has already attained to the status of an “Islamic State” by virtue of nothing more than the introduction of *hijāb* for women and of *shar'ī* punishments (*ḥudūd*) for certain crimes, and the assumption of governmental power by groups of self-appointed “guardians of Islam” who conceive themselves—after Western patterns and against all truly Islamic tenets—as a body of ordained clergy. . . .

It is with the aim of contributing something to a clarification of the fundamental issue confronting the world of Islam in this period of transition that I am now placing this essay for a consideration by all Muslims who realise that emotion *alone* will not bring us closer to our goal: in short, all Muslims who want, and are able, to think for themselves.

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As I have mentioned at the outset, the following pages are the result—and occasionally even *verbatim* transcriptions—of writings published in the form of articles forty years ago: and this may explain a number of repetitions occurring in the present essay—repetitions for which the reader's indulgence is sought.

I. PROLEGOMENA

THE HISTORY of mankind is marked by the growth and decay of civilisations. Sometimes they are restricted to a particular region or race, like the civilisation of ancient Egypt; and sometimes they are produced by the joint efforts of several races and spread over vast expanses of space, just like the present-day Western civilisation. How they begin nobody exactly knows. Apart from the myths and legends which every civilisation carries with it—in a subconscious, *post factum* attempt to explain to itself its beginnings—we are never given a precise, historical pointer as to the How and When of its *origin*. Whenever it becomes visible to the historian for the first time, it always appears in the shape of a full-fledged organism—that is, it appears as something that must have had a certain measure of evolution behind it: but this organic past somehow eludes our exact definition. The historian, looking backwards, perceives no more than a *fait accompli*. He sees the civilisation in the ripeness of its full development or, looking still farther back, he may discern its early, formative stages—but that is all. He can never perceive the exact time and manner of its birth. The reason for this historical disability of ours lies in the fact that, as a rule, civilisations are never “born” in the sense in which an individual being is born: they flow, imperceptibly, one into another, without a clear-cut transition.

True, we can often detect a civilisation’s “ancestry” by analysing the legends, customs, philosophies or artistic traditions which it shares with other civilisations, contemporary or preceding; but we are unable to determine the transition from the “ancestor” civilisation to the one which we are contemplating. And this holds good of dead and living civilisations alike. Who can determine, for instance, the beginnings of European civilisation? We know that it

Prolegomena

slowly evolved out of the broken remnants of the Roman Empire in unison with the Oriental religion of Christianity adapted to Occidental needs and temperaments; but when, exactly, did that new, compound civilisation attain to a distinct form of its own? It must have been some time in the early Middle Ages—a period, that is, of some four or five centuries. We cannot be more precise than that. There is no scholar who could place his finger on a particular historic moment, or even a particular century, and say, “That was the beginning of European civilisation, and such-and-such were the exact circumstances of that beginning.” In fact, the process by which European civilisation came into being spread over a great length of time; and all its essential characteristics—its world-view, its ethics, its laws, its customs and social institutions, its economic and political organisation—were the outcome of a slow intermingling of most diverse cultural traditions. For, the traditions of Imperial Rome and of Christianity were not the only determinant factors in it: they soon converged with the paths of Celtic and Germanic tribal traditions, without which European civilisation as it is now would be unthinkable: paths coming from the unexplored mists of time and pointing back, most probably, towards Central Asia. And as regards the Romans: was the beginning of *their* civilisation more clearly outlined? If we pursue it backwards, we find, again, that it was the result of a complicated cultural coalescence, with one path leading to the Romans’ predecessors in the Italian Peninsula, the Etruscans—in themselves a very complicated race and culture which probably originated in Asia Minor—and another to the Greeks: and from the Greeks, again, partly to Asia Minor and partly to that hazy complex which we are wont to describe as Minoan culture, centred in Crete and probably rooted in Egyptian traditions. Similar is the case with Hindu civilisation, stretching its nebulous past northwards beyond the Pamirs into Central Asia, southwards towards the Dravidians—again a race and culture of obscure origin—and linking, over Mohenjodaro, perhaps with the Sumerians of Mesopotamia; and such is the case with the civilisation of Biblical Israel, fathered, beyond the count of time, in the Arabian deserts and in the fertile plains of Mesopotamia, with distinct relations to the Chaldaeans, Babylonians, Egyptians and the mysterious Hittites; and so it is with the prehistoric origins of China’s civilisation; and with its Tartaro-Polynesian offshoot in Japan; and with Iran and Babylonia and Assyria; and with every

one of those innumerable, colourful, complicated movements which we describe as civilisations. However deep we dig into the cultural past of mankind, we never find a definite point at which a civilisation could be said to have been "born": never a visible threshold between the ending of the Old and the beginning of the New.

But there is one exception: an exception almost staggering in its uniqueness. Of all known civilisations, there is only one which has crossed the threshold between non-existence and existence with a single step and has visibly come into its own at a precise moment in history: the civilisation of Islam.

Whereas all the others haltingly evolved out of many cross-currents and traditions, and always required great lengths of time to arrive at specific forms of their own—this one, exceptional civilisation burst all of a sudden into life, endowed from the very beginning with all the essential attributes of a civilisation: a sharply-outlined community, a characteristic world-view, a comprehensive system of law, and a definite pattern of social relations. This endowment was due not to many cross-currents and traditions, but to a single, historic event: the revelation of the Qur'an; and to a single, historic personality: the Arabian Prophet Muhammad. The people who became Muslims by following the Prophet and accepting the Qur'an as their code of life were fully aware of the fact that the new ideology laid before them implied a complete break with their traditional outlook and their old ways of life; and that its acceptance by them, the simple people of Arabia, was synonymous with the emergence of something entirely new in the life of mankind: that is to say, they were aware that Islam, being a complete system of life, not only demanded or "heralded" a new civilisation, but actually inaugurated it. To them, as well as to the historian of later times, the advent of the Prophet of Islam was a definite *beginning* in the fullest sense of the word.

Now this should not be taken to mean that the civilisation of Islam had no links with the past. Such an implication would be preposterous. No organic phenomenon (and a civilisation undoubtedly belongs to this category) is ever without ancestry. It cannot, therefore, surprise us that the teaching of the Apostle of God, notwithstanding the originality of its world-view and of its social code, contained much that was already in evidence in older religious systems, and that it reiterated many moral truths which had been

regarded as truths in previous times as well. None—least of all the Qur'an—would ever deny this; nor would anybody deny that certain aspects of pre-Islamic Arabian life are incorporated in Islam's social scheme. But one should not be led into thinking that all such earlier elements crept into the ideology of Islam surreptitiously, as a sort of "afterthought" on the part of the Prophet or (as Western scholars often assume) as a concession to traditions prevailing in his country and his time. For, whatever social elements Islam shares with the Arabian *jāhiliyyah*, and whatever ideas it has in common with Jewish or Christian religious thought was already part and parcel of Islam at the very moment of its birth—and this in consequence of the fundamental principle underlying Islam in all its expressions: the principle of *historical continuity* in the life of mankind.

Life—so the Qur'an made clear long before anybody dreamt of the theory of evolution—is not a series of disconnected jumps but a continuous, organic process; and this law applies also to the life of the mind, of which religious thought is a part. The extraordinary personality through whom Islam was revealed to us never claimed to be the discoverer of new religious truths. His was only the task to act as the bearer of God's Message, to give voice and final form to truths as old as humankind itself—truths that had always been true, although at times men had not completely grasped them, or had forgotten or distorted them—and to propound on their basis a social code that would perfectly correspond to man's real needs and would therefore be practicable in all times to come. It is, thus, fully in keeping with the God-made law of historical continuity that Islam contains, besides much that is startlingly new, some elements that were evident in older religious forms as well; and it is equally in keeping with this law that such elements were *organically* transmitted to the new civilisation which arose on the basis of the Islamic code.

(Here a word of explanation is necessary. My frequent insistence, now and in the following, on the term "Islamic civilisation" may sound confusing if it is taken to refer to the various historical expressions of Muslim achievement—for instance, the culture of the Baghdad Caliphate, or of Egypt in the Mamlūk period, or the administration systems of Mughal India, or the scientific, literary and artistic attainments of the Arabs in Spain, and so forth. I wish, therefore, to make it clear at this point that by "Islamic civilis-

ation" I mean the peculiar ethical outlook, the social scheme and the way of life engendered by Islam, and *not* the specific achievements of the Muslims in any one country or period of their history.)

It goes without saying that this Islamic civilisation, so singularly initiated in the clear light of history, did not all at once attain to the fullness of its form: for, being an organism, it had to *grow*. Now organic growth implies not only an evolution of inborn qualities, but also the absorption of extraneous matter: and so it is only natural that in the course of time the civilisation of Islam received certain additional impulses from other cultures and to some extent changed its original shape. Such effects of cultural environment on the growth of a civilisation are very similar to the influence of physical and social environment on a growing child. But as all the effects of environment cannot alter the fundamental structure of the personality which every child possesses at the moment it leaves its mother's womb, so the later changes in Islamic civilisation could not fundamentally alter its original "predisposition", although sometimes they obscured or even corrupted it. With all those changes, the fact remains that Islamic civilisation was a distinct, self-contained organism at the very time of its meteoric birth, which, as we know, took place at a clearly definable historical moment: namely, the twenty-three years of the Prophet Muḥammad's ministry. And there is not, and never has been, any other civilisation anywhere, at any time, that would permit us to establish the historic moment and the exact circumstances of its birth.

Now this historical uniqueness of Islamic civilisation may be quite imposing in an academic way; but, one might ask, is it really so important for us to know—and always to remember—that its origins were morphologically different from those of all other civilisations?

I believe that it is. The possibility of determining the exact beginnings, the *When* and the *How* of our civilisation, is indeed of much more than mere academic importance. It is not only necessary for an understanding of our past, but may have practical consequences for our present and future as well. For, such a possibility enables us to view the civilisation of Islam in the pristine integrity of its earliest youth, still free from the accretions which later were to distort some of its features—and so it enables us to determine its original structure and the direction of its "will". When a civilisation has passed through many centuries of development, it is usually diffi-

cult to discern what it had originally aimed at—that is to say, what social and cultural ideals it comprised—for the tendencies which had been at its root may, in the meantime, have been overlaid by elements not originally belonging to it, so that the cumulative energy which constitutes a civilisation's life may have been deflected from its original course and may gradually have found channels quite different from those in which it had run in the beginning. In short, a living civilisation is an extremely flexible, changeable phenomenon.

A determination of their original predisposition may be, for all practical purposes, unimportant in the case of "traditional" civilisations. (I am using the term "traditional" to denote movements which are not based on an ideology, but rather on values which derive their significance from the fact of their having been "handed down" from generation to generation.) The continued vitality of such civilisations does not depend on the maintenance of any "original will" in an ideological sense: it depends only on the maintenance of the creative energy as such, without regard to the channels that it may choose or any ideological transformations that it may undergo. All such "traditional" civilisations were produced by geographical and racial necessities; and all of them were, or are, dominated by no more than an urge towards self-realisation on the part of a particular people, race or group of races enclosed within a particular geographical space. This urge towards self-realisation is purely instinctive, and therefore *evolutional* in the strictest, biological sense of the word. It may be likened to the growth of a tree which rises upwards from its roots, draws nourishment from earth and air, and branches out according to the intangible rules of its own vitality in conjunction with the properties of soil and climate. You can never exactly predict what direction each individual branch will take and how far the growth will go. And, to be sure, from the viewpoint of the tree such a prediction is entirely irrelevant: for, not the direction but the *fact* of living growth is what matters here.

But the problem is quite different with an *ideological* civilisation such as that of Islam. Being no less than the vehicle of a definite idea (a "programme"), it does not owe its existence to a mere instinctive urge towards self-realisation on the part of a particular race or nation. Although, of course, it can materialise only through the concrete medium of human beings, its momentum does not

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depend on the racial vigour of any *one* people: it depends only on the conscious association of individual men and women—of whatever race or habitat—who intellectually and emotionally identify themselves with the idea of Islam and find in themselves the readiness to implement its principles in practical life. In such a civilisation a popular knowledge of its original aim is all-important: for, accompanied by the will to implement that aim, it is the *only source of cultural energy*. As soon as this knowledge is allowed to become blurred, the civilisation ceases to be ideological, and is bound to break up into various national—that is to say, “traditional” civilisations, which will henceforth follow only the unconscious rules of race-development and will have nothing in common with each other beyond dimly-remembered associations in their past history.

It is obvious, therefore, that our ability to establish the exact beginnings, and thus the ideological “will” of Islamic civilisation is and always has been of supreme importance for its continuation; and particularly so in our days.

II. A TIME OF CHANGE

WE ARE NOW living in extraordinary times, marked by a world-wide violent transformation and confusion—ethical, political, social and economic—a confusion engendered by two world wars and the subsequent breakdown of centuries-old social, ethical and economic forms. The whole world is in turmoil—and we Muslims, too, cannot, even if we wanted, continue to live as we have hitherto been living, complacently secure in the illusion that the pattern of life accepted as valid in past times must forever remain valid; for that complacency, that security of convictions or illusions has been shattered by what has happened to us in the last few centuries.

At a time like this, we must begin to take stock of our cultural holdings. It is not enough to say, “We are Muslims and have an ideology of our own”: we must also be in a position to *show* that our ideology is vital enough to withstand the pressure of the changing times, and to decide in what way the fact of our being Muslims will affect the course of our lives: in other words, we must find out whether Islam can offer us precise directives for the formation of our society, and whether its inspiration is strong enough in us to translate these directives into practice.

In order to reach such a decision, we must begin to think anew about Islam, about what it really signifies, what its real laws are; for we have stopped thinking about these matters for a good many centuries and have merely relied on what previous generations of Muslims thought *about* Islam. In consequence, our current theology (*kalām*) and canonical jurisprudence (*fiqh*) now resemble nothing so much as a vast old-clothes shop where ancient thought-garments, almost unrecognisable as to their original purport, are mechanically bought and sold, patched up and re-sold, and where the buyer’s only delight consists in praising the old tailors’ skill . . .

We cannot go on like this at a time when the Muslim world is in the throes of a crisis which may make or unmake Islam's validity as a practical proposition for many centuries to come. Never was there a more urgent need for heart-searching and brain-searching. One does not require particularly sharp eyes to see that, set as we are in the midst of a rapidly changing world, our society, too, is subject to the same inexorable law of change. Whether we like it or not, a change there will be: it is, indeed, already being enacted before our very eyes. The Muslim world *is* in transition—a fact that is as obvious as it is pregnant with tremendous possibilities for better or worse. For better or worse: since we must not forget that “change” is but another word for “movement”: and, within a social organism, movement can be creative as well as destructive. But whereas there is no power on earth which could now keep our society from changing, we are still free to determine the *direction* which this change should take: it is still up to us to decide whether we shall build our future on the real values of Islam—or entirely drift away from Islam and become passive camp-followers of other civilisations.

There is no other alternative. Nothing could be more stupid than to try to persuade ourselves that, if we but wanted, we could cling to yesterday's notions and conventions in their entirety. Those who do so—and there are, unfortunately, many of them—are playing the game of the proverbial ostrich that buries its head in the sand in order to escape the necessity of making a decision. A dangerous game this, in addition to being unspeakably silly: for, like that famous bird, our friends—however well-intentioned—are depriving themselves of every opportunity to meet the oncoming challenge of the times: in this case, a challenge to the eternal validity of Islam as a culture-producing force. Their minds seem to work on the supposition that our recent past was “Islamic”; and that, therefore, everything that implies a departure from the conventions of our yesterday—both with regard to our social customs and our approach to problems of law—goes against Islam; and that, on the other hand, everything would be in perfect order if we could but preserve the social forms and the scheme of thought in which our grandfathers lived. To put it differently, our ostriches assume that Islam and the conventions of Muslim society are one and the same thing (which, of course, is utter nonsense); and that the survival of Islam depends on the maintenance of the very conditions which

nowadays make it impossible for Muslims to live in accordance with the true tenets of Islam (which, obviously, is very bad logic). But however absurd these assumptions may be, they nevertheless provide the basis on which the minds of many Muslims nowadays operate; and their unwillingness to concede the necessity of *any* change drives countless other Muslims to a helpless imitation of the Occident, either in its Capitalist or in its Marxist manifestations, or, alternatively, to an equally blind, self-defeating belief in the imminence of a *quasi*-Mahdist “Islamic revival”.

These pages, therefore, are addressed to people who know that there is no survival value in playing the ostrich. They are addressed, in particular, to those of the Muslims who realise the desperate crisis of Islamic communal life and civilisation; who, therefore, wish to think for themselves and refuse to be fed on mere catchwords and illusions; who regard self-deception as one of the most serious of sins; who have the courage to face the facts as they are, and not as they would *like* them to be; who, in short, desire not only to “serve” Islam but to live it.

To such people I am offering this contribution to a revival of Muslim thought. If some of my readers think that my criticism is unduly harsh and, on occasion, irreverent, let them remember that the wind that comes before dawn is often harsh, and on occasion even ill-pleasing. But it is just such a wind that we need—a fresh wind that would blow away the cobwebs of our decadence, a wind that would blow us back to the Two Sources of Islam, the Qur'an and the Prophet's Sunnah, from which the life of our *ummah* started and to which it must return if it is not to disappear into thin air.

Let us be honest with ourselves and admit that we have strayed far away, indeed, from the ideology provided by the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Ours is the old, old story of the rich man's son who has squandered his splendid patrimony and now wallows in the gutter. Centuries of intellectual lethargy, of dumb adherence to formulas, of the meanest internecine wranglings, of laziness, superstition and social corruption have dimmed almost beyond recognition the glorious promise held out by our beginnings. Centuries ago we ceased to exercise our wits in the search for knowledge, although our religion had enjoined it upon us as a sacred duty; we talked of Al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, of Al-Battānī and Ibn Hayyān—and went complacently to sleep over their achievements. We talked about the wondrous social programme of Islam, about the equity

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and naturalness of its tenets—and all the while we flew at each others' throats, exploited one another or, alternatively, submitted in squalid contentment to every kind of exploitation at the hands of unscrupulous rulers. We always pretended to believe that the Qur'ān is a sure guidance in all matters affecting man's life—and nevertheless we grew accustomed to regard it as mere edifying literature, good enough to be recited in prayers and on ceremonial occasions and, wrapped in a silken *ghilāf*, to embellish the uppermost shelves in our rooms, but not good enough to be followed in practice. We claimed that Islam is a religion of reason (which, in fact, it is)—and none the less we meekly agreed to, and sometimes even welcomed, suppression of reason by anyone who just happened to be in power: for most of our '*ulamā*' were telling us that in matters of religion independent thought is heresy, and that only he can be a true Muslim who blindly repeats the formulas evolved in olden days (and evolved by scholars who were human, and therefore liable to err), like a parrot which has learnt its lesson once and for all.

And the result of these failings—the list of which could be extended indefinitely?

There are many hundreds of millions of Muslims in the world today—but among all these millions there is not a single community that *really* lives according to the tenets of Islam; not a single community that could show, as an example to the world, how Islam solves the social and economic problems which nowadays worry mankind so much; not a single community that could produce, in the realms of science, arts or industry, *anything* better than any Western community; or that could, culturally and politically, at least compete on equal terms with any Western community of comparable size. All the blustering talk of our past glories, all our assertions as to what Islam stands for, cannot change the fact of our present humiliation.

These are facts—some of the facts—and there is no denying them.

III. TALKING OF MUSLIM REVIVAL

YOU MIGHT be tempted to say: "Well, these are facts of our yesterday. It is true that we were stagnant and corrupt for a long time. But you cannot deny that the present is beginning to be different. You cannot deny that nowadays there are many people among us who do realise how defective our recent past has been: people who feel a burning love for Islam and work for its revival. Look at the many writings published in these days in which questions of our daily life—morals, education, politics, economics—are discussed from the Islamic point of view; look at all the speeches, books, pamphlets, periodicals, conferences and street demonstrations intended to bring the message of Islam nearer to the masses; look, in particular, at the idea of an Islamic State—now being realised in some Muslim countries—which aims at the building of a Muslim polity ruled by Islamic Law. Can you deny that the Muslims are now coming to their senses?"

Of course I am not denying that the examples just mentioned are so many signs of the Muslims' coming to their senses. No one can deny that there are signs of new stirrings in the conscience of the Muslims; of new hopes connected with the old, eternal truths of Islam. Side by side with a certain section of our "intelligentsia" that has always been fascinated by the brilliant, deceptive façade of Western civilisation there is another, growing section which has begun to look to *Islam* for guidance. Many of these people are confused, or simply ignorant, and can do no more than wait and hope; some have a greater clarity of mind and are able to discern a definite direction for their endeavours; and a few of these can, in addition, express their thoughts in speech and writing. In such people lies a promise of an Islamic revival—a *promise*, mind you, and not yet a fact. We have not yet reached the stage of actual revival—not

by a long stretch. There has not been much change yet in the practical aspect of our lives: no change, that is, in the direction of true Islam. So far, there has been merely a lot of talk: pious talk, arrogant talk or silly talk. We Muslims, it seems, are great artists at talking. . . .

Now I do not mean to say that talk—in which term I include the written word—is unnecessary, otherwise I would not be writing these lines. Talk and discussion are absolutely necessary in order to clarify the existing confusion of our thought and to obtain a correct assessment of the problems with which we are confronted. And they are particularly necessary in our community, which cannot be truly Islamic unless it reflects this cardinal, Qur'anic characterisation of the *ummah*: "Their rule [in all matters of common concern] is consultation (*shūrā*) among themselves" (*sūrah* 42:38). But consultation alone—*talk* alone—cannot lead us anywhere. It might lead us somewhere—that is, to a new reality of Islamic life—if it would cause us to accept the Law of Islam, the *sharī'ah*, as a really serious proposition. So far, only a very few Muslims appear to take this Law of ours seriously: namely, as a practical scheme which confers an obligation on us to abandon our slothful ways and to work for a thorough reconstruction of our communal life.

We must always remember that Islam is not concerned with spiritual principles alone: for, unless they have a counterpart in practical rules of conduct, spiritual principles lend themselves to most contradictory interpretations, and thus to a variety of social (or anti-social) conditions. A typical example of this can be found in Christianity, which contents itself with preaching beliefs and morals without bothering about their transformation into a definite *social scheme*; and so it remains content with being an accompaniment to a socio-economic state of affairs that has not the remotest connection with Christian ethics. But, unlike Christianity, Islam does not content itself with merely demanding a certain spiritual attitude that could be adjusted to all manner of cultural, social and economic settings, but insists on the believer's accepting its own scheme of *practical* life as well. Within the framework of this scheme, which is called *sharī'ah*, Islam has its own views on progress, its own definition of social good, and its own pattern of social relations. In the measure, therefore, that concepts borrowed from another civilisation and another outlook on life become dominant in the shaping of Muslim society, they deprive

Islam of its function as a society-shaping power; and in the measure with which we willingly submit to such outside influences, we imply that Islam has no real claim to that function.

And this is the kernel of our problem. In the conscious and sub-conscious readiness of so many of our brothers and sisters always to imitate the social, political and economic forms of the West—even within the context of endeavours aiming at the re-establishment of a *really* Islamic polity—lies a silent, involuntary implication that Islam has no real claim to being a society-shaping power. Naturally so: for if our views as to how man should arrange his affairs are derived from sources other than Islam, we implicitly deny to Islam any right to dictate our scheme of life. The most one does concede to Islam in such a case (and the most that, in fact, *is* being conceded to it in many contemporary Muslim communities) is to provide a sort of spiritual music which may accompany our practical endeavours, but must on no account interfere with them!

Such an attitude evidently clashes with the fundamental concepts of Islam, which is nothing short of a definite *programme of life*. Reduced to the status of a mere spiritual backdrop, deprived of its primary function—to determine our behaviour and the practical forms of our society—Islam becomes a meaningless word. So much should be clear to anyone who has the slightest acquaintance with its principles. It does not, however, seem to be clear to many of our "intelligentsia" who, because of their more up-to-date education, are most influential or most vocal in present-day Muslim society. They do not seem to realise that, in the human context, Islam stands and falls with its ability to shape our society and to direct our activities. Owing to the unwillingness on the part of most of our leaders to admit this obvious truth, Islamic civilisation (meaning the civilisation in which the *sharī'ah* was once the fundamental, guiding element) has become entirely illusory, no matter how this or that Muslim country is "progressing" in the current sense of the word, or how much emotional attachment to Islam there still exists among the Muslim masses. For, of all the people who love to bask in the fanciful hope of an impending revival of Islam, hardly anybody looks upon Islamic Law, the *sharī'ah*, with all its far-reaching implications, as a serious socio-political proposition for today and tomorrow (quite apart from the fact that the views as to what the *sharī'ah* actually is and aims at are extremely confused). Many among us talk glibly of "Muslim culture"

—meaning, probably, the culture of the ‘Abbasid period, or of Muslim Spain, or of Mughal India—and neglect to consider the social ideology of the *sharī‘ah*, on which those various expressions of our culture were, in the last resort, based. And to overlook this essential basis of Islamic civilisation and at the same time to regard the practical orientation of Muslims towards Western concepts—even within the context of efforts aiming at an “Islamisation”—as a sign of their cultural revival amounts, whether we like it or not, to intellectual dishonesty.

As I have already mentioned, there is no denying the fact that the Muslims have lately acquired many educational and technical facilities which they did not possess yesterday; but to speak in this context of an “Islamic awakening” is certainly premature. For, whether we are contemplating the superficial social changes or the basic political innovations in almost all Muslim countries, we find that even in the few ones where the *sharī‘ah* is still—or once again—formally recognised as the law of the land, many an administrative and economic advance (be it real or imaginary) is almost invariably paid for by a corresponding disregard of the genuine forms of Islam.

It is irrelevant in this connection to consider whether the traditional Muslim civilisation, the civilisation of our yesterday, truly reflected the postulates of Islam, or not. We know that it did not. Most of us have by now realised that in the last few centuries our life was only very superficially connected with Islam, and that Muslim society not only of today but also of yesterday, far from being a faithful mirror of the Islamic postulates, was actually, in most respects, a living contradiction of those postulates. But (and this is a most important “but”) whatever its deviations from the path indicated in the Qur’ān and the example of the Prophet, that defective, decadent civilisation of ours did acknowledge, formally at least, the primacy of Islam as the guiding element in our existence: and this acknowledgment provided, and still provides, a platform for endeavours to correct the aberrations of the past and to return to the true scheme of Islam. A tacit tendency, on the other hand, to approximate our political concepts and even our terminology to the concepts and the forms prevailing in the Western world makes it increasingly difficult for the Muslim community to correct the errors of its past in a really Islamic spirit.

IV. WHOSE IS THE FAULT?

IT IS, however, not quite fair to place the blame for all these shortcomings on the shoulders of the Muslim community as a whole. If the Muslims fail to implement the *sharī‘ah* to its full extent, the fault is not theirs alone—seeing that in most cases they have no other choice. They are not really *permitted* to know what the *sharī‘ah* is and what its real sources are.

Every ordinary, intelligent Muslim has heard a lot—and is hearing every day—about how “simple” Islam is; but whenever he takes the trouble to look into the matter, he finds that a thousand years of theology (*kalām*) and canonical jurisprudence (*fiqh*) have made that simplicity entirely illusory. He sees many sects and schools of thought, often bitterly opposed to one another, and each of them claiming to be the only legitimate exponent of Islam. Our ordinary, intelligent Muslim, not being a professional *faqīh* himself, is naturally baffled by all that intricacy of accumulated scholarship and by the resultant diversity of religious conceptions prevailing among the professional *fuqahā’*. Very soon it becomes obvious to him that the views as to what Islam aims at, what a Muslim is and how he should behave are not quite the same with, say, a Sunnī ‘*ālim* belonging to the Hanafī school, a fundamentalist Wahhābī, a “Twelver” Shī‘ī, or a Šūfī—not to mention many lesser schools of thought. In his inability to master the complex theological and legal systems underlying all these “schools”, the ordinary, intelligent Muslim very often despairs of ever being able to decide, for himself, as to what is “Islamic” and what “un-Islamic”; on the other hand, if he is a person of really mature intelligence, he refuses to be guided by mere assertions (and contradictory assertions, at that) of the professional ‘*ulamā’* who claim to be “in the know”—quite apart from the fact that he is often re-

pelled by their mediocrity and their bland ignorance of the world around them. What he wants—and what he believes himself entitled to—is a direct, personal insight into the programme of Islam; and as he is unable to obtain it, he ceases, for all practical purposes, to regard the Law of Islam as a guidance in the business of living. Sometimes he entirely turns away from Islam and becomes what is termed an “agnostic”; alternatively, if he is of a conservative bent of mind, he sticks to some of the conventional forms of Islam without, however, allowing them to influence the practical course of his life.

The gist of my contention is this: Instead of being given a true, simple—and therefore easily understandable—picture of Islam, the Muslims are constantly being presented with a monstrous, many-sided edifice of scholastic interpretations—a “second-hand” Islam, as it were—which was fixed and solidified into its present complexity nearly a thousand years ago. These interpretations fall roughly into two headings: *fiqh*, which is the technical name for Muslim jurisprudence (and which the *fuqahā* themselves not infrequently confuse with the *sharī’ah*), and *kalām*, which is a particular brand of Muslim theology conceived in Aristotelian and Neo-Platonic terms. Between them, these two disciplines have produced not one but many systems—mostly conflicting with one another—of what is popularly, and quite incorrectly, termed “Islamic Law”. But these systems are not only many in number: each of them is, in addition, subdivided into a multitude of “schools” in accordance with the complicated, hair-splitting reasoning adopted by its representatives. If you look into any compendium of *fiqh*—for instance, the very readable *Bidāyat al-Mujtahid* by Ibn Rushd (in which the author impartially quotes the views of the various legal schools without giving his personal preference), you will find that there is practically not a single problem of law, great or small, on which the various schools and systems fully agree. As regards *kalām*, the divergencies are still more pronounced and, as a rule, much more violently expressed than in *fiqh*.

In this way, the principles and the application of the *sharī’ah*—which, as we know, touches upon every aspect of human existence and is the life-breath of Islam—have been made wholly inaccessible to the understanding of anybody but a highly specialised scholar, and to him only as an academic proposition and not as an actual path of life. There was a time when Islam really was

a simple affair, a scheme on which every Muslim could consciously cooperate; but that time is long since gone. With a very few glorious exceptions, the ‘*ulamā*’ of the past centuries persuaded themselves that nobody could understand Islam unless he implicitly accepted all that the early generations of Muslim scholars had already written about it. In consequence, the ‘*ulamā*’ did and still do their best to impress upon the “common man” that it is his moral duty to be a human parrot; that the Law of Islam (or whatever now goes by that name) must be obeyed, but not necessarily understood; that an approach to its principles can be achieved only after a long, specialised study: in other words, that the *sharī’ah*, though it touches upon everybody’s life, is none the less not everybody’s business. Once upon a time (this much is admitted), the Qur’ān and the Prophet did address themselves to everybody—but owing to some mysterious decree (not, however, to be found in the Qur’ān or the Sunnah), this principle seems to have undergone a change, and the knowledge of the *sharī’ah*, which once had been a living presence in the daily thoughts and doings of every adult Muslim, came to be reserved to a special, and specialised, class of scholars. Whether they intended it or not, the highly complicated reasoning which Muslim *fuqahā* have adopted in their various expositions of the Law has cut off the latter from the people’s living thought. The “common man” is now expected to take the decisions of the *fuqahā* at their face value—and no arguments, please!

The result could not be other than it is: namely, an estrangement of the “common man”, however intelligent, from the true spirit of the teachings which he professes to follow.

It is evident that, besides enunciating certain positive directives as to our behaviour and action, the *sharī’ah* has also a most important psychological function to fulfil: it is meant to inculcate in man something which is best described as a “moral habit”—that is, man’s instinctive ability to decide at every stage of his life whether an impulse (in which term I include all desires and inclinations, likes and dislikes) is or is not in agreement with the general moral scheme envisaged by Islam; and, parallel with it, the instinctive urge to follow the right impulses and to subdue the wrong ones. But since the historical evolution of *fiqh* and *kalām* has resulted in an estrangement of the Law from the average Muslim’s consciousness, the conceptions as to what is and what is not Islamic have been divorced from any “moral habit” in the true sense of the word, and

have been transformed into purely *mechanical* habits. This rigidity of religious thought (or, rather, the enforced absence of thought) has made for complete sterility in our social life—naturally so, for, in its original constitution, Islamic society was based on nothing but religious thought. As long as that thought was alive, the programme of Islam was a practical proposition; but when religious thought became the preserve of “specialised scholars”, the practicability of the *sharī‘ah* became an illusion: for, instead of being a way of life, the knowledge of the Law became a merely academic affair—a mountainous collection of ideas *about* Islam, so thickly overlaid with the dust of decadent conventions that the Prophet himself, were he alive in our days, would find it difficult to recognise his own teachings.

The erstwhile simplicity and reasonableness of the *sharī‘ah* has been almost entirely buried in a forest of subjective deductions pro-pounded by several generations of scholars nearly a thousand years ago. Thus, many of our so-called “Islamic” notions are in reality nothing but a heritage of the Neo-Platonic philosophising so fashionable in the Middle Ages; and many of these notions are downright faulty—because they were based on a faulty, or inadequate, understanding both of the world around us and of the original teachings of Islam. (This holds true, in particular, with regard to innumerable opinions on social and moral matters.) Nevertheless, such faulty notions have ever since been upheld by “accredited” leaders of religion, and have thus become endowed with the halo of religious sanctity: in other words, the popular mind has grown accustomed to identify, uncritically, those worn-out processes of thought with Islam itself—a custom fraught with tragic consequences. For, when a more critically-minded time—as ours most certainly is—begins to reveal the inadequacy of so many of those old opinions, the popular mind begins to question the validity of Islam as such. This, however deplorable, is only natural. The average Muslim, never having been taught to think for himself, is extremely gullible. Just as easily as he can be misled by pseudo-religious superstitions and slogans, he is prone to fall into the opposite extreme and to question the *principle* of Islam as soon as any of his habitual, personal “convictions” has been shaken.

V. A NEW APPROACH

OBVIOUSLY, we cannot live as Muslims in the true sense of this word unless we are fully aware of what Islam *demand*s of us. We cannot return to our original religious and cultural ways (both of which are intertwined in Islam) unless we know *what* those ways are. We cannot regain that cultural poise which was ours in bygone days unless we obtain a new, *direct* insight into the programme of Islam—an insight, that is, which discounts all by-paths of conventional thought, however sanctified by the usage of centuries, and takes into account only the Two Sources of Islam, the Qur’ān and the Sunnah. A simple reliance on conventional formulas will not do because apart from the fact that many of these formulas frankly contradict one another, most of them were conditioned by the spirit and the experiences of a time vastly different from our own.

Now this calls for an explanation.

As every student of Islam knows, only a part of the laws comprised in what today goes by the name of the *sharī‘ah* is derived from injunctions laid down in a direct, unequivocal manner in the Qur’ān or in the Sunnah. By far the larger part of those supposedly *shar‘i* laws is an outcome of the deductions and the subjective reasoning of the great *fuqahā’* of our past—deductions and conclusions, to be sure, conscientiously based on the context of the Two Sources, but none the less subjective in the sense that they were determined by each *faqih’s* individual approach to, and individual interpretation of, problems not laid down unequivocally, in terms of law, in either of those Two Sources.

Whereas the self-evident, unequivocal injunctions of both the Qur’ān and the Sunnah are and must forever remain valid for us and cannot be subject to any amendment, no such finality and validity can legitimately be attributed to deductions or conclusions

subjectively reached by *any* person below the Prophet. In other words, no subjective deduction, interpretation or conclusion touching upon any problem of law arrived at by means of the *ijtihād* (individual reasoning) of any, even the greatest, Muslim scholar can ever be binding on the community. The reason for this categorical assertion would seem to be obvious.

Psychology teaches us that our *conception* of things or ideas—the basis of all reasoning—is a highly subjective process and can only in the rarest of cases, if ever at all, be dissociated from our temperamental leanings, our habits and idiosyncrasies, our social environment, and the sum-total of our conscious and subconscious knowledge: in brief, from all the imponderable influences which act together in the shaping of what we describe as our “personality”. The conception which I form of a thing or an idea is invariably moulded and coloured by my environment and my previous experiences: and so it is not an exactly-mirrored replica of the object in question, but rather a *registration of that object's effect on me*. What actually happens in my mind resembles the taking of a photograph through a lens with many irregular facets—the shape and relative position of the facets being conditioned by the constitution and the previous experiences of my mind. It follows, therefore, that, given the same object (or idea), the image that I conceive of it cannot be in all respects identical with the image which *you* would conceive: for your mental “lens” must naturally differ in some respects from mine. If we belong to one and the same time and have, therefore, similar backgrounds of experience and a similar store of conscious and subconscious knowledge, our “lenses”—and the pictures which they produce—will have many points of resemblance: that is to say, our mental processes will be very similar. In spite of minor discrepancies due to our different individualities, our thought-images (“conceptions”) will be, for all practical purposes, almost the same; and even where we differ, we will be able to judge correctly each other's ways of thought. But this is not always the case with people belonging to spheres widely separated from one another in time and cultural surroundings. Here the differences often become very acute. What to people of one period may have appeared to be a reasonable—and perhaps the *only* reasonable—inference or conclusion, frequently appears to be a wrong inference, and therefore a wrong conclusion, to people of a much later period: simply because the people of the

later period have gone through different sets of mental experiences, and so the “lenses” of their minds are differently constituted.

It must be remembered that this insight into the working of the human mind is a comparatively recent achievement of psychology, and that the Muslim legists and philosophers of a thousand years ago could not be expected to have possessed it. But their inability—and still more the inability of their successors—to recognise what today is a commonplace truth has come to be of great consequence to the religious and cultural history of Islam: for it has caused a deformation of many Islamic concepts. The Muslims came to believe that all the subjective conclusions of the early scholars were valid in an absolute sense and for all times to come. From the Islamic point of view, nothing could have been more disastrous than this belief: it led to a standstill of religious thought, and thus to the gradual decay of the civilisation that had been built on that thought.

It is no use to deny that a good deal of the Islamic scheme has been brought into a false perspective through our assuming that the views of the “early generations” of Muslim scholars were in every respect identical with the view of the Law-Giver Himself. We must have the courage and the humility to admit that all knowledge gained by means of subjective reasoning is time-bound and, therefore, relative. For long centuries we have neglected the Prophet's saying that “knowledge is like the sea”: that is, inexhaustible and always open to new adventures of the spirit. For centuries we were told (without the slightest warrant in the Qur'ān or the Sunnah) that the edifice of Islamic learning had been completed forever in the findings of the “early generations”: and so we are today confronted with a picture of Islam which is not only extremely complicated – and therefore not accessible to the understanding of the ordinary, intelligent Muslim—but which also frequently clashes with our own moral and historical experiences. We cannot get around the fact that, in many respects, that old picture has evolved from notions which had nothing to do with Islam as such but only reflected the general state of knowledge in those far-off times—notions that may have been convincing then but need not be convincing now.

In justice it must be stated that the great scholars of those “early generations” never made any claim to finality. They simply gave, in all conscience, the results of their intellectual convictions. In their endeavour to make Islam the bedrock of the community's existence, they tried to reach individual conclusions as to the inten-

tions of the Law-Giver: and in this they were guided by the general knowledge available in their time no less than by their deep knowledge of the Two Sources of Islam; that is, they tried to interpret matters Islamic in the light of their own understanding. Their high degree of learning, gained by life-long, devoted study of the subject, gave those great scholars—later termed *imāms* (“leaders”)—a position of unequalled authority in the eyes of their contemporaries and induced the Muslim masses of later, more decadent times to believe that the findings of those *imāms* represented, objectively, the highest possible stage of religious knowledge and were therefore final for ever and ever. As I have already said, such a pontifical elevation was by no means sanctioned by the *imāms* themselves. They, like the Prophet’s Companions, never claimed to be final authorities in the exposition of the Law; they gave their opinions as opinions only, and not as verdicts. It is, for example, recorded that Imām Abū Ḥanīfah said, “If you find in my words anything that conflicts with the Sunnah of the Prophet, throw my words to the wall and keep to the Sunnah”—which shows that he was perfectly aware of the *relativity* inherent in all human reasoning. It was but his successors who quickly overlooked this element of relativity and formed a “school” of rigid imitation; and the same happened to several other great scholars of that period—with the result that the “early righteous generations” (*as-salaf aṣ-ṣāliḥ*) were gradually, and undoubtedly against their will, removed from the sphere of creative criticism, and blind reliance on their authority was made a “postulate of Islam”. In short, Muslims became accustomed to see infallibility where no infallibility had been claimed.

Are we to continue in the same error?

We cannot do that if Islam is to survive as a religion and a culture-producing factor. We must, once again, approach its Two Sources with fresh and unprejudiced minds—just as if the Qur’ān had been revealed in our days and the voice of the Prophet were still audible in our midst, speaking to you and to me and to every passerby: for, in truth, he was sent to you and to me and to the people of our time no less than to the people of thirteen or fourteen centuries ago. If we desire to regain our lost cultural impetus, we must not place our reliance on second-hand formulas or allow ourselves to stick at any price to yesterday’s concepts and conventions. Nor, to be sure, can we allow ourselves to reject (as our “progress-

ives” would like us to do) all such formulas, concepts and conventions, since many of them are perfectly sound and do correspond to the requirements of Islamic life. But what we must guard against is a static perseverance in forms of thought which have nothing to recommend them except their old age: in other words, we must guard against the idea that five or six centuries ago Islam was better understood than it could be understood today. Most emphatically it was not. The *sharī’ah* of Islam has been utterly mishandled and corrupted not only today, not only yesterday, but for nearly a millennium: since the time, that is, when it was cut off from the direct understanding of the average man and woman and became, unwarrantably, a preserve of “specialised” scholars.

I should like to make it quite clear that there can be no question of “improving” or “reforming” the *sharī’ah* as such: for we believe it to be of Divine origin, perfect, and beyond any possibility of improvement; we believe, furthermore, that all contingencies of human life, social and individual, have been fully anticipated in this Law, and so it must be adequate to the needs of all times. But precisely *because* it has been thus widely conceived, the Law must be accessible not only to a handful of professional scholars but to every Muslim man and woman of average intelligence and education—that is to say, it must be accessible on the authority of the Qur’ān and the Prophet alone. Now this, you will concede, is quite impossible as long as our concept as to what the *sharī’ah* consists of retains its present complexity: and so we will have to review this concept and find out whether it is really in agreement with the Law-Giver’s aims.

We shall find that it is not. Our review, I am convinced, will prove that the traditional complexity and hair-splitting diversity of our legal thought and its reservation to a class of “specialists” are not warranted by the Law-Giver. It will be found that the social discipline envisaged by the true *sharī’ah* is not synonymous with rigidity but is, on the contrary, calculated to foster all the truly creative powers of which man, spiritually and socially, is capable; and that this true *sharī’ah* is so concise, clear-cut and uncomplicated that every man and woman whom God has graced with sound reason, and not only a specialised ‘*ālim*, should be able to understand what is “Islamic” and what “un-Islamic”—in other words, how a Muslim should live. And it will be seen that this direct approach to the Law will not, as is sometimes feared, open the doors to indiscriminate *ijtihād* (that is, to a multitude of arbitrary

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“interpretations” of the Law) but will, on the contrary, bring home to every Muslim that the *sharī'ah* is one and indivisible—beyond the reach of subjective interpretations, and certainly in no need of them—being the fundamental, unchangeable constitution of Muslim life; and, furthermore, that *ijtihād*, though necessary and justified in its proper sphere, must on no account be regarded as a legitimate means of establishing *sharī* laws beyond and above what is *explicitly* laid down in the clear wording of the Qur'ān or the Prophet's Sunnah.

It would lead us too far at this stage of our investigation to consider our problem in all its implications. For the present I have tried to give its outline only, and to indicate the direction in which our endeavours should move: namely, to free the *sharī'ah* of Islam from all the irrelevancies and burdensome accretions that have grown up around it in the course of centuries of decline and to establish it, once again, as a practical, living guidance towards an Islamic way of life. For, there can be no doubt that the true *sharī'ah* (as propounded by the Qur'ān and the Prophet and understood by his Companions) is now almost hidden in a maze of scholastic views and deductions—a superstructure of subjective opinions accumulated in the course of centuries and now clothed in the garb of fictitious “authority”. To remove this superstructure is the main task of our time. It should not make the slightest difference to us that many of its details have since been sanctioned by custom and convention. When we are out to rediscover the original shape of the Law, as we must if we wish to survive, we are obviously not concerned with custom and convention but with the Law itself.

This should not be taken to mean that we are entitled to deny all value to convention as such—for, even where it is not directly based on the *sharī'ah*, convention need not necessarily be opposed to it. As I have said earlier, it cannot be denied that many of the conventional concepts evolved in the past millennium and now prevailing in Muslim society are still religiously and culturally viable and may, therefore, hold good for our time as well. But we must never lose sight of the fact that the validity of such concepts depends on our finding that they are in full accord with the true intentions of the *sharī'ah*—which, after all, is the core and backbone of Islam. In each and every case, the explicit—and *only* the explicit—injunctions of the Qur'ān and the Sunnah must be our ultimate criterion for accepting or rejecting any convention.

VI. THE BASIS OF OUR CIVILISATION

FROM THE very outset, Muslim civilisation was built on foundations supplied by *ideology* alone. It has never had anything to do with the concepts of race or nation, and so it lacks the cement of racial or national homogeneity which was and is so decisive a factor in all other civilisations. Ours has always been an ideological civilisation—with the Law of the Qur'ān as its source and, more than that, as its only historical justification. To speak of the Muslim *ummah* as of something politically justified and culturally valuable (and therefore to be cherished and defended) and, in the same breath, to question the importance of Islamic Law as the form-giving element in our life is hypocritical or, alternatively, an outcome of ignorance. For what values remain in that much-vaunted *ummah* if we resile from its *sharī* background? Certainly not a social philosophy worth the name: for that is based on the concept, derived from the *sharī'ah*, of a divinely-willed order in human relations. And certainly not its ethics: for, a Muslim's notions of good and evil flow in their entirety from the Qur'ān and the teachings of the Prophet. And not even a political ideal: for, the only political ideal which has distinguished the Muslims from the rest of mankind was the revolutionary concept of a brotherhood of men united not by ties of blood or race but by their consciousness of a common outlook on life and common aspirations: a concept realised nearly fourteen centuries ago in the establishment of the Islamic *ummah*—a community open to every man and woman, of whatever race or colour, who accepted this common ideal, and closed to everyone, even one's nearest kinsman, who refused to accept it: in brief, a real “social contract”.

Thus, if the *sharī'ah* is removed from our day-to-day endeavours; if we begin, in the manner of Western nations, to make a

distinction between practical life and religion, our civilisation, or whatever remains of it, is bound to forfeit not only its identity but also its historical justification—because everything that contributed to its growth in the course of many centuries was connected in one way or another with the creative force of religion.

As I have already pointed out, not all civilisations were thus simply and clearly motivated. In most of them, religion was but an *accompaniment* to other, equally or even more decisive cultural forces—for instance, in European civilisation, where Christianity was always only one of several factors of development. This being so, one can well imagine that the West might one day throw Christianity (or, for that matter, every kind of institutional religion) overboard, and nevertheless retain the living identity and continuity of its culture. A pointer in this direction is supplied by Soviet Russia, where Christianity has been definitely rejected as a fount of social ethics: and, in spite of this rejection of Christianity, the communist experiment in Russia cannot be said to be less “Western” than the conservatism of, say, America, where institutional Christianity still retains its honoured—albeit merely theoretical—position.

But whereas in other civilisations, of which the modern West is only one example, it may be theoretically possible (although I personally doubt it) either to retain institutional religion or to discard it outright without destroying that civilisation’s strength and continuity, we Muslims have no such alternative. For us, religion has never been just one of the contributing factors of cultural development: it has always been the very root and source of that development. So far as we are concerned, an elimination of religious thought and, specifically, of Islamic Law from the realm of economics, politics and social life would imply more than a mere change in cultural direction. It would imply the *loss* of all cultural direction. Hence, in the measure that Islamic Law ceases to be a practical proposition in our day-to-day life, Islamic civilisation must necessarily become a contradiction in terms, and Muslim society a society of cultural mongrels and spiritual half-castes.

As soon as we come to realise this, we begin to understand why it is that in our days the general run of Muslims do not follow Islam in spirit or even in form, and follow only a number of customs vaguely associated with Islam. With most of our contemporaries, “faith” has become a figure of speech, a mere empty word devoid of that spark of enthusiasm which in the early days of our history inspired

the Muslims to imperishable deeds of cultural and social achievement. No doubt, Islam is still alive as an *emotion*. It is alive in the instinctive love of countless millions of people who vaguely feel that its principles are “right”: but only very few of them grasp those principles intellectually and are able, or genuinely prepared, to translate them into terms of practical life. We must not, therefore, wonder that Muslim civilisation has arrived at the end of a blind alley and now persists only by virtue of its dumb, unconscious vitality. It cannot forever persist in this state. In its very nature, Muslim society was conceived in terms of ideology alone: that is to say, not emotion but conscious adherence by great numbers of people to the ideology of the *shari’ah* was its foundation. If we permit this foundation to remain as ineffective as it is at present, Islam is bound to recede by degrees from the stage of real life and to become, sooner or later, a mere historic memory or, at best, a vague spiritual admonition similar in its effectiveness, or ineffectiveness, to that of Christianity.

But *why* has Islam become so ineffective? Why does it not—and did not for a great length of time—function properly? Is it possible, after all, that the ideas and ideals of Islam are in some respects defective, and therefore not attractive enough for all times? Has it yet a mission to fulfil—or is it a “spent force”? Has it really something unique to offer—something for which there is perhaps no equivalent in any other ideology—or is this only an illusion produced by our love of traditional forms? In short, is it a mere reactionary sentiment? Is the original message of the Qur’ān still vital enough, and relevant enough, to satisfy our spiritual longings and to shape our outlook on life—or is it out of tune with what science and experience have since taught us? Does Islam offer solutions for all the pressing social and economic problems of our time—or was its programme time-bound, that is, adaptable only to the social and economic conditions at the time of its birth and not really relevant to the needs and problems of present-day life? To put it bluntly: Is Islam really a practical proposition for our present—or mere traditional ballast?

These are most pertinent questions. They roll like thunder under the surface of modern Muslim life and perturb the minds of many people who have minds worth speaking of. They are often being raised by non-Muslim critics of Islam and—what is far more important from our point of view—by not a few Muslims who are sick-

ened by the spectacle of cultural and social decline so evident in the Muslim world of today: no creative strength; a confusing chaos of views as to what is and what is not "Islamic"; the absence of all genuine—that is, practically asserted—pride in our own culture; the mounting, mostly unconscious imitation of Western social aims and forms by Muslims; the sterile conventionalism of our 'ulamā', who have nothing to offer but formulas and pious admonitions. In the face of all this, one might well ask, "On what grounds, then, do you claim that Islam is a 'practical proposition'?" One might argue that the decay of this civilisation of ours—a civilisation admittedly based on Islam—shows that this basis was, in reality, not practical enough to ensure our society's positive, continuous development forever. . . .

Indeed, our critics do argue on precisely these lines. They tell us, condescendingly enough, that the principles of Islam "might" have been all right a thousand or fourteen hundred years ago, when human society was less complicated and human needs simpler, but that "our time demands a more up-to-date ideology". Whatever stimulus, they say, the teachings of the Arabian Prophet may have given to culture in past centuries has now resolved itself into a play with old formulas; not accidentally so—but because, in the opinion of those critics, Islam was the man-made product of a particular time and a particular environment. In the meantime, so the argument goes, mankind has acquired new experiences and new needs; and as the old teachings were relevant only to social and intellectual conditions which have now become obsolete, it is only natural that modern Muslims are gradually abandoning them and are beginning to turn for cultural inspiration to the more vital, more up-to-date civilisation of the West. In other words, our critics assert that Muslim civilisation has decayed because *Islam itself* has proved inadequate for the requirements of the present age.

Seeing that Muslim civilisation *has* indeed decayed, and that Muslim society *is* indeed rapidly losing all vestiges of its one-time Islamic colour, the above argument contains a most serious challenge to everybody who believes that, in spite of the present Muslim degeneration, Islam is much more than a mere passing phase in the history of mankind. It will do us no good to evade this challenge by simply saying that "Muslim society has decayed because the Muslims have ceased to live in accordance with the spirit of Islam". True as this statement may be, it does not fully

explain our problem; it does not even touch upon its core. For, if the teachings of Islam are all that we claim them to be, there must be some valid *reason* why the Muslims have ceased to live in accordance with the spirit of Islam. "Well, what *is* the reason?", asks the unfriendly critic. And here our conventional Muslim, having no convincing explanation to give, remains entirely mute—while his opponent merely shrugs his shoulders and says, "Apparently because that spirit was inadequate to the demands of progress. . . ."

Now what do *you* say? Shall we, you and I, follow the example of our mute friend and remain equally speechless in the face of what amounts to a thorough condemnation of Islam and thereby, indirectly, give the right to the critics who maintain that Islam was nothing but the product of a particular time and environment and is, therefore, "out of date"?

We cannot do that. We believe—we *know*—that the message of Islam is God's Own Message to mankind, valid not only for a particular time, but for all times—otherwise I would not have written these pages and you would have no reason to read them. This being so, neither you nor I are prepared to admit for a moment that the spirit of Islam *could* be inadequate to the real needs of this or any other time. We are, on the contrary, convinced that the Islamic teachings offer everything that man needs spiritually and socially, whatever his stage of development. But, on the other hand, we are faced with the iron fact that the spirit of Islam is not being—and has not been for a good number of centuries—translated into practice by the many millions of people professing the Islamic faith. It is not reasonable to suppose that all those millions could have voluntarily, through mere negligence, forgone all the manifold advantages which, according to our claim, Islam places before man. Why, then, *did* they forgo these advantages?

If we wish to see Islam in practice once again, we must supply an answer—a really satisfactory answer—to this riddle.

VII. ISLAMIC CIVILISATION AND ISLAMIC LAW

ISLAM WAS and is primarily an intellectual and not an emotional movement. This assertion is, of course, not to be taken in too narrow a sense, for, however intellectual in its genesis, there has never been any movement in the life of mankind which could be divorced from emotional elements. It is, on the contrary, a curious fact of history that precisely those movements which begin with a purely intellectual act—the enunciation of a definite, clearly-outlined idea—very soon develop, and retain, a powerful emotional momentum. But whatever connection between men's rational acceptance of an ideology and their subsequent emotion-charged attempts at its realisation, such movements forever retain the stamp of their intellectual *origin*. So it was with Islam—and so, in more recent times, with the Marxist movement (although the latter's one-sided materialism and its implicit denial of the value of human individuality set it entirely apart from the spiritual-cum-social scheme envisaged by Islam).

In this sense, Islamic civilisation can correctly be described as "ideological". It began with the enunciation of an idea by the Apostle of God and its acceptance by individual men and women; and the surging emotion which at once engulfed all those who fell under the idea's spell, though very important in itself, was only secondary to their original, intellectual perception of the Qur'anic call:

"Say [O Prophet]: 'This is my way: Resting upon conscious insight accessible to reason (*'alā baṣīrah*), I am calling you all unto God—I and they who follow me'" (*sūrah* 12:108).

Explaining this verse elsewhere, I have said:

"It is impossible to render the expression '*alā baṣīrah*' in a more concise manner. Derived from the verb *baṣura* or *baṣira* ('he became seeing' or 'he saw'), the noun *baṣīrah* (as also the verb) has the abstract connotation of 'seeing with one's mind': and so it signifies 'the faculty of understanding based on conscious insight' as well as, tropically, 'an evidence accessible to the intellect' or 'verifiable by the intellect'. Thus, the 'call to God' enunciated by the Prophet is described in the above verse as the outcome of a conscious insight accessible to, and verifiable by, man's reason: a statement which circumscribes to perfection the Qur'anic approach to all questions of faith, ethics and morality, and is echoed many times in expressions like 'so that you might use your reason' (*la'allakum ta'qilūn*) or 'will you not, then, use your reason?' (*a fa-lā ta'qilūn*), or 'so that they might understand [the truth]' (*la'allahum yafqahūn*), or 'so that you might think' (*la'allakum tatafakkarūn*); and, finally, in the oft-repeated declaration that the message of the Qur'an as such is meant specifically 'for people who think' (*li-qawmin yatafakkarūn*)."^{*}

Hence, if it be true that Islamic civilisation does not draw its nourishment from any racial or national sentiments in the people it embraces, but only from their conscious acceptance of the programme of Islam—then it is equally true that their *knowledge* of that programme must precede their emotional readiness, or ability, to make it work. Thus, Islamic life *must* remain an illusion until the Muslim community, or at least an overwhelming majority within it, are fully aware of what the programme of Islam really implies and are resolved to cooperate towards its fulfilment. *Awareness*, as we have seen, is in this context of crucial importance. A mere emotional adherence to Islam, an adherence, that is, without a clear comprehension of its ideology—the *shari'ah*—can produce neither the ability nor the resolve to make it work in practice. Nor can it create the "moral habit" so indispensable to a truly Islamic life—namely, the ability to decide instinctively, whenever an occasion arises, which of our impulses are right and which are wrong from the viewpoint of Islamic ethics. As long as the Muslims, or the

^{*} Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an* (Dar al-Andalus, Gibraltar, 1980), p. 354, note 104.

majority among them, are aware of the spiritual and social aims implied in the Law of Islam and are convinced that an observance of this Law will lead them to a fuller, more satisfying life, the "moral habit" engendered by the *shari'ah* is a powerful factor making not only for individual righteousness but also for effective social cooperation and cultural progress.

It may, however, happen—as indeed it did happen—that at a certain stage of its development the community loses its direct, popular touch with the premisses of the Law (the "programme"), simply because generations upon generations of scholars have added their *personal deductions* to the original, clearly-stipulated ordinances of the Law, thus making it more and more complicated and remote from the consciousness of the common man. The previous, community-wide awareness of the Law gradually recedes. Instead of knowing it, as his predecessors did, through personal insight, the common man is forced to rely increasingly on second-hand expositions of the Law offered by people who have specialised in its study. The opinions of these mediators naturally differ in many points, and the scrutiny of these different opinions requires a great amount of learned labour, resulting in further additions to the original ordinances of the Law and thus in an enlargement of its original scope. In the course of time the structure of legal thought grows so alarmingly huge and complicated that even the "specialists" are compelled to call a halt to further development. This they achieve by deciding, quite arbitrarily, that the early expositions and interpretations of the Law (say, up to the third century of Islamic history) are henceforth to be regarded as "final". But, unfortunately, even those early expositions and interpretations are so numerous and in many points so conflicting that it is in practice impossible to present them *directly* to the common man: again, only a "specialist" can re-interpret and harmonise them—which is, of course, impossible without further additions to, and superimpositions on, the original Law. . . .

And so, for the common man, the *shari'ah* becomes a remote affair. The element of consciousness—the direct awareness, by every Muslim, of what the Law of Islam implies—is supplanted by the rule of formulas. Social cooperation is deadened into mere convention. The erstwhile "moral habit" loses all its vitality and is transformed into an automatism of customs and customary notions. As a result, all creative impulses within the society slow

down and cool down. The socio-economic scheme becomes less and less obvious and, therefore, real progress on its basis becomes increasingly difficult and, in the end, stops entirely. Political power, originally built on the Muslims' conscious adherence to the ideology of Islam, gradually crumbles and gives way to all manner of tribal, dynastic and sectarian squabbles. Economic decay sets in, followed by cultural stagnation. Thought itself dies down and only vague emotion remains in the place of one-time intellectual splendour. The society ceases to be cohesive in its structure; with the loss of its ideological basis it loses, step by step, its shape as well and becomes an easy prey to every kind of disruptive influence coming from other civilisations. And when all this has happened, Muslim society as such is ready for dissolution.

It is not difficult to recognise that this is precisely what *has* happened in the world of Islam—not only today and not only yesterday, but for several centuries. The decay of Islamic civilisation, the progressive weakening of faith in Islam, the ineffectiveness of the Islamic teachings in our actual lives—all this is almost entirely due to the fact that for centuries the Muslims have been out of touch with the true premisses of Islamic Law. The spirit of Islam is not being translated into practice because for nearly a thousand years the common man has been *prevented* from knowing through personal insight what the Law of Islam really is.

VIII. DISCUSSING A PROPOSITION

AT THIS stage somebody is bound to protest against my conclusions. He might say: "You are over-hasty in your generalisations. Admitting that the present-day 'ulamā' have not done much to bring the average Muslim into direct contact with the genuine teachings of Islam, these teachings are still open to everyone who may be interested. We have the Qur'an and the authentic Traditions of our Prophet, and besides, voluminous books have been written on the *sharī'ah* and on *fiqh*."

But this, precisely, is the point which I wish to make. *Too* many books have been written on the *sharī'ah* and on *fiqh*—so many, in fact, that the real, genuine *sharī'ah* propounded by the Qur'an and exemplified by the Apostle of God has been entirely obscured, and the concept of *fiqh* has been so twisted that it is now regarded as part of the *sharī'ah* itself. How often have you decided for yourself, on the simple evidence of the Qur'an and the Sunnah, what the Law of Islam says on this or that problem? Did you not go, rather, to a secondary source, to a person whom you supposed to be "in the know", to decide that point for you? And didn't that person refer in his answer to *another* secondary source—namely, to the writings of a *faqīh* who lived and wrote centuries ago and who, in his turn, relied on the verdicts (or what he regarded as verdicts) given by one of the great *imāms* of the "early generations"?

"That," my interlocutor will say, "is unavoidable. You cannot expect the average Muslim to know the Law of Islam through personal insight; and you cannot demand of him, either, that he should exercise his own *ijtihād* in the formulation of *sharī'ah* laws, for this would lead only to confusion and to a disruption of the unity of Islamic Law. Some sort of reliance on the *ijtihād* of the great, old

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leaders of Muslim thought is, therefore, absolutely necessary for the ordinary man or woman of our times."

But this, I believe, is just where Muslim society has gone wrong. Strange it may sound, *ijtihād*—that is, independent reasoning—has nothing to *do* with a "formulation of *sharī'ah* laws": which of course does not mean that it has not a most important, legitimate role to play in the development of Muslim thought and social planning. However, the scope conventionally attributed to *ijtihād* goes far beyond the intentions of the Law-Giver, as I shall endeavour to show in the sequence. And as for a person who, for one reason or another, is unable to gain, unaided, a direct insight into the Law, one can do no better than quote the relevant passage from the work of one of the greatest Muslim thinkers of our past:

"[In *sharī'ah* matters,] it is not lawful (*lā yuhillu*) for anyone to follow blindly the opinions of anybody else, living or dead, seeing that everyone is obliged to resort to independent reasoning in accordance with his ability [to do so]: for he who inquires about problems pertaining to his religion wants but to obtain an insight into what God Almighty enjoins upon him in the context of this religion. Hence, if he happens to be entirely ignorant,* it is incumbent upon him to find out which person in his part of the world is most learned on the subject of the religion brought by the Apostle of God; and when this [learned man] is pointed out to him, he should put his problem before him. After the latter has explained to him the relevant legal injunction (*aftahu*), the inquirer should ask: 'Is it in this manner (*hākadhā*) that God Almighty and His Apostle have stated this [particular law]?' Now if the learned man answers in the affirmative, the inquirer should accept that [answer] and henceforth act upon it. But if the learned man tells him, 'This is my personal opinion (*ra'yī*)', or that 'This is a judgment by analogy (*qiyās*)', or 'This is the verdict of so-and-so', mentioning a Companion of the Prophet or a person of the next generation or an ancient or contemporary *faqīh*, or if he remains silent altogether, or if he rebukes the inquirer [for asking such questions], or if he tells him, 'I do not know'—then it is not lawful for him [who asks] to accept that

* Lit., "the most ignorant of creatures" (*ajhal al-bariyyah*).

man's verdict, but, none the less, he should direct his question to another [learned man]."*

And so, without being a *mujtahid*, even an ignorant person can obtain a direct insight into the Law: for although in his case this insight is gained through the instrumentality of another person—namely, a scholar regarded as trustworthy—the paramount condition of gaining it *directly* is satisfied by a positive answer to the question, "Is it in this manner (*hākadhā*) that God and His Apostle have stated this particular law?"

* Abū Muḥammad 'Alī ibn Ḥazm, *Al-Muḥallā*, Cairo 1347 A.H., Vol. I, p. 66.

IX. THE COMPANIONS AND THE LAW

I SHALL now ask the reader to follow me through a short historical review of the concept of the *sharī'ah*—which literally means, "the way to a watering-place" (from which men and animals derive the element indispensable to life). In religious terminology it denotes the Right Way marked out in the commandments of God and His Apostle: the Law of Islam. The term *shāri'* ("Law-Giver") is applied to God and, after Him, to the Prophet—firstly because it was through the Prophet that God revealed to us the Qur'ān, which is the fountainhead of all laws; and, secondly, because as the bearer of divine revelation the Prophet was best fitted, and therefore divinely authorised, to explain the Qur'anic laws and to show us how they are to be applied to problems of practical life. Therefore, the Qur'ān commands the Prophet to tell his followers:

"Say [O Muḥammad]: 'If you love God, follow me, [and] God will love you and forgive you your sins; for God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace'" (*sūrah* 3:31).

But apart from interpreting matters expressly laid down in the Qur'ān, the Prophet was ordained to supplement them by further injunctions which, if given in terms of command or prohibition and authenticated beyond any possibility of doubt, are as binding on a Muslim as the laws enunciated in the Qur'ān: and so we arrive at a definition of the Prophet's *Sunnah* as the Second Source of the *sharī'ah*.

It might be useful at this stage to state clearly what we mean by the term *Sunnah* in the context of *sharī'i* legislation.

Although it goes without saying that everything which the Apostle of God did, commanded or consented to comes under the general heading of "Sunnah" in its wider sense—namely, his way

of life—we must never lose sight of the fact that many of his actions and sayings were prompted by *specific* occasions or circumstances, and were not intended by him to be binding on his followers at all times and in all situations. Among such specific actions and sayings we may discern (a) purely *personal* manifestations arising from the Prophet's individual—albeit most outstanding and exalted—humanness; and (b) commands or prohibitions meant by him to be valid only for a particular group of people or a particular moment in history. Hence, when I speak here and in the following of the Prophet's Sunnah in connection with *shar'ī* laws, I refer only to injunctions which were unmistakably conceived by him as valid for all times and at all stages of the community's social and cultural development.

The Companions, living as they did in the inspiring shadow of the Prophet, were naturally aware of the intentions of the Law-Giver: they not only knew that the *sharī'ah* was fully laid down in the Two Sources of Islam—the Qur'ān and the Sunnah—but, also, that everything that God and His Prophet intended to be law was contained in the unequivocal expressions, called *naṣṣ* (pl. *nuṣūṣ*), of the Two Sources. Such injunctions are, by definition and by their very nature, not liable to more than one interpretation: as a matter of fact, they do not *require* any interpretation, being absolutely self-evident and self-contained in their meaning. For, “the *naṣṣ* of the Qur'ān and the Sunnah denotes the injunctions (*aḥkām*) contained in the plain (*zāhir*) wording of these sources” (*Lisān al-'Arab*, art. “*naṣṣ*”). Edward William Lane, whose great Arabic-English dictionary is in its entirety based on the classical Muslim lexicographers, summarises and defines the term *naṣṣ* in relation to the Qur'ān and the Sunnah as “a statement plainly, or explicitly, declared or made manifest by God and His Apostle; . . . an expression, or a phrase, or a sentence, indicating a particular meaning, not admitting any other than it; . . . a statute or an ordinance indicated by the manifest, or plain, meaning of words of the Qur'ān and of the Sunnah” (Lane's *Lexicon*, Vol. VIII, p. 2798).

The reader should note the philologists' ever-recurring insistence on each of the *nuṣūṣ* being conditioned by “plain (*zāhir*) expressions” which have “a particular meaning, not admitting any other than it”—that is, injunctions in the Qur'ān or the Sunnah which are so unequivocal that a divergence of opinions becomes impossible.

Thus, whenever the Companions were in need of a legal ruling, they first looked for a corresponding *naṣṣ* injunction in the Qur'ān; and if they could find no clear reference in it to the particular point in question, they turned for enlightenment to the Prophet—for none of them arrogated to himself the right to “make” *shar'ī* laws through subjective deduction. Laws derived by subjective thought-processes must necessarily lead to disagreement; and the Companions were ever-mindful of the Qur'anic injunction, “If you disagree on any matter, refer it to God and the Apostle” (*sūrah* 4:59), i. e., to the Qur'ān and the Sunnah. On the other hand, matters not specified in the *naṣṣ* of either the Qur'ān or the Prophet's Sunnah were considered to be only *indirectly* related to the Law, and were therefore regarded as the legitimate domain of *ijtihād* (individual, independent reasoning). The results of such individual reasoning could not, in the Companions' view, claim to possess *shar'ī* authority; that is to say, they regarded such conclusions as morally binding only on the person responsible for them or, at the most, on those who were subject to his judicial authority. To them, no truly *shar'ī* law could be “derived” by means of *ijtihād*—nor was there any need to “derive” laws in such a way, for everything that had been meant to be a *shar'ī* law was unmistakably laid down as such in the *naṣṣ* of the Qur'ān or of the Sunnah. This attitude of the Companions and the Prophet's unequivocal approval of it is best illustrated in the famous, well-authenticated *hadīth* of Mu'adh ibn Jabal on his appointment as Governor of the Yemen.

“The Prophet asked him: ‘How wilt thou decide the cases that will be brought before thee [for judgment]?’ Mu'adh replied: ‘I shall decide according to the Book of God.’—‘And if thou find nothing concerning [that particular matter] in the Book of God?’—‘Then I shall decide it according to the Sunnah of God's Apostle.’—‘And if thou find nothing [about it] in the Sunnah of God's Apostle?’—‘Then,’ replied Mu'adh, ‘I shall exercise my own judgment (*ajtahidu ra'yī*) without the least hesitation.’ Thereupon the Prophet slapped his chest and said: ‘Praised be God, who has caused the messenger of God's Messenger to please the latter!’” (Abū Dā'ūd, Tirmidhī).

It is, of course, obvious that the Prophet's approval of his Companion's common sense did not imply his sanction of Mu'adh's

future, as yet non-existent legal judgments as a sort of "addition" to the laws already stipulated as such in the *naṣṣ* of the Qur'ān and the Sunnah. As a matter of fact, there is not the slightest evidence of the Prophet's ever having stated that the *ijtihādī* judgments of any of his Companions would or could be legally binding on people outside that Companion's governmental jurisdiction (as was the case with Mu'ādh ibn Jabal). As the Prophet well knew, his Companions would not at all times be of one and the same opinion on all matters; indeed, being but human, they were bound to hold various, sometimes quite contradictory views on problems not laid down in terms of law in the clear wording of either of the Two Sources.

But since none of them ever arrogated to the results of his own opinions any legal weight in the *shar'ī* sense, their differences of opinion did not create any confusion; they were, in fact, treated as something apart from the body of the *sharī'ah* as such.

X. A NEW DEVELOPMENT

THE INDEPENDENCE of thought displayed by the Companions of the Prophet with regard to problems not laid down in the *nuṣūṣ* of either of the Two Sources began to appear to later generations as an ideal beyond their reach. To some extent this may have been due to the extraordinary veneration in which the Companions had been held. "What was good enough for the Friends of the Prophet," reasoned some of the later scholars, "is too much for us." But this was not the only reason. The later generations knew perfectly well that the Companions had believed it to be the right and duty of every Muslim to act according to the dictates of his reason alone in matters not explicitly regulated by *naṣṣ* laws: on the understanding, of course, that one had to be guided in his reasoning by the spirit of the Two Sources. But whereas the Companions had the life-example of the Prophet—and therefore the direct or indirect solution of most of their problems—before their eyes, for those who followed them the situation was becoming more and more difficult. Not only was the distance from the Prophet's time steadily increasing, but also the social structure of the Muslim world was rapidly growing wider and more complicated. It did not appear simple any more to confine *shar'ī* jurisdiction to the *nuṣūṣ* of the Two Sources and to relegate all matters not explicitly dealt with therein to the discretion of individual judgment; for, with the rapid political and economic expansion of the Islamic Commonwealth such outstanding matters had grown immensely in number and importance, and were constantly growing. In addition to this, many cultural influences from the newly-conquered territories—such as Neo-Platonic philosophy, Graeco-Roman conceptions of state and government, Christian and probably also Indian mysticism, Byzantine and Iranian methods of administration, and so

forth—were beginning to make themselves felt throughout Muslim society. A subtle corruption was creeping into the legal system and the ideology as a whole. Juridical *ijtihād* no longer stopped before the unshakable *naṣṣ* of the Qur’ān and the Sunnah but, fostered by unscrupulous rulers and a variety of vested interests, began to undermine the Two Sources by means of elaborate casuistry, by twisting *shar’i* injunctions out of their contexts, and by giving arbitrary interpretations even to laws which, by virtue of their clear and explicit wording, had “a particular meaning, not admitting any other than it”

Fearing lest the life of the Muslims be estranged from true Islam and lose its homogeneous quality in a sea of multiform, contradictory legal opinions, most of the great ‘*ulamā*’ of the first two centuries A.H. began to feel the need for a legal system which would cover all aspects of private and social life as thoroughly as possible and would at the same time closely follow the spirit of Islam. Now the *naṣṣ* statutes of the Two Sources are, as we know, strictly limited in number and do not provide for all legal contingencies. (In the course of our investigation it will be shown that the Law-Giver never *intended* those statutes to provide for all contingencies.) Faced with the very actual danger to the unanimity of Muslim thought, the great scholars of the period began to extend the clearly-stipulated (*naṣṣ*) ordinances of the Law, by analogy and deduction, to cases and contingencies not originally covered by it: in other words, they set themselves to the task of supplementing the ordinances of the Divine Law by an additional *corpus juris* consisting of rulings derived from the Qur’ān and the Sunnah by means of *deduction*. In itself, this was an admirable endeavour; and, utilising as they did all avenues of contemporary thought and keeping at the same time as close as was humanly possible to the spirit of the Two Sources, those great ‘*ulamā*’ succeeded in stemming the flood of non-Islamic influences which were threatening to undermine the unanimity of the Muslim outlook: for, by means of those *ijtihādī* deductions the Muslim community was enabled to find its way in legal matters not included in the body of the *sharī’ah* as such, and became thus largely independent of foreign, non-Islamic legal concepts.

The tentative rulings obtained by deductive methods were in the beginning few in number, and were confined to the most important problems of law. But gradually, with the advent of new exigencies

and the corresponding increase of juridical problems, there appeared, almost imperceptibly, the tendency to treat those learned deductions (against their authors’ will) not as additional to, but as forming part of, the *sharī’ah* itself: a development, it will be seen, of crucial importance.

The endeavours of the early legists of Islam resulted in a new science called *fiqh* (literally, “understanding”). In the post-classical, conventional terminology of later-day legists, *fiqh* came to denote the scientific discipline aiming at a definition of the laws comprised in the *sharī’ah*, or supposed to be comprised in it “by implication”. The term itself is a very old one, having already been used by the Companions, albeit in a much simpler sense: namely, in that of “understanding the Law”. To them, the counterpart of *fiqh* was the equally old term *riwāyah*, meaning the textual knowledge of, and the critical acumen in, the transmission of the Qur’ān and of authentic Traditions, which together provide the *nuṣūṣ*, and thus the substance, of the Law. Both these terms—*riwāyah* and *fiqh*—were employed by the Companions and their immediate successors in their original, linguistic sense. Thus, it is said of ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Umar that he was very reliable (*jayyid*) in the transmission of *aḥādīth*, but not so with regard to *fiqh* (cf. Ibn Sa’d, Vol. II/2, p. 125), whereas ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās is praised (*ibid.*, pp. 122 and 124) as not only possessing positive knowledge (*‘ilm*) of the substance of *aḥādīth*, but also as being most understanding (*afqah*) with regard to the purport of the injunctions (*aḥkām*) contained therein, and thus able to form his own opinion (*ra’y*). As already pointed out, there is a subtle, but none the less far-reaching difference between the term *fiqh* as conceived at the time of the *ṣaḥābah* and the same term as used in later periods.

Let us now consider, in outline, the principles and methods of *fiqh* as it is conventionally understood today and has been understood for the last eight centuries or so.

It is claimed that the objective of *fiqh* is twofold: firstly, to decide what the laws of the *sharī’ah* are, and, secondly, to show how those laws are to be applied to practical cases. As regards the *naṣṣ* ordinances, the procedure is perfectly simple because the very nature of those ordinances makes them clearly understandable: they consist of “plain expressions, indicating a particular meaning, not admitting any other than it”—and so they are neither in need of interpretation nor liable to be variously interpreted. The difficulty

arises with regard to laws which are *not* laid down in *naṣṣ* terms and, supposedly, have to be “established” by means of *ijtihād*. From early times Muslim jurists were aware of the necessity of finding definite rules according to which their deductive reasoning should proceed and attain to legal value. Obviously, the first rule to be applied in deciding any particular case not covered by *nusūṣ* would be its analogy, formal or substantial, with a point of law clearly illustrated in the *naṣṣ* of either of the Two Sources: and so, deduction by analogy—termed *qiyās*—came to be commonly accepted as a legitimate method of *establishing* laws. In cases where no such analogy was forthcoming, some of the legists took recourse to personal opinion (*ra’y*) at which they arrived after due consideration of the entire context of the Qur’ān and the Sunnah. Now in both the Qur’ān and the *aḥādīth* there are innumerable passages and expressions the meaning of which is not as clear and unequivocal (*muḥkam*) as the *naṣṣ* statements; and so, in order to discern in them a legal intent on the part of God and His Prophet, such non-*muḥkam* passages obviously require an interpretation—that is to say, the exertion of subjective reasoning. But since every human being, however learned and however pious, is liable to commit mistakes, some of the great scholars maintained that no individual *ra’y* (an opinion not backed by the self-evident text of either of the Two Sources) could ever be regarded as having legal force. The same argument applies also to the principle of *qiyās* which, after all, is but a restricted form of *ra’y*: for, a case which in the opinion of one scholar bears distinct points of analogy with a case illustrated in the *naṣṣ* of one or both of the Two Sources may not necessarily appear as analogous in another scholar’s view, and *vice-versa*. Thus, the opponents of the principle of *ra’y* among the early scholars attributed legal force, in the first instance, only to *naṣṣ* ordinances and, further, to the obvious or “self-understood” (*mafḥūm*) indications, apparent in the Prophet’s Sunnah, as to how these *nusūṣ* are to be applied to actual cases. Consequently, many of the early scholars came to rely on *aḥādīth* as the ultimate material from which to deduce points of law not explicitly formulated as such in the *naṣṣ* of the Two Sources. Such was the position, for example, of Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal. In order to provide the raw material for all legal questions, he compiled a huge compendium of *aḥādīth*, the famous *Musnad* (reduced to writing, after his lectures, by his son ‘Abd Allāh); but the very extent of this

collection—comprising, together with its supplements, nearly 30,000 items—makes it understandable that many of the *aḥādīth* quoted therein are historically weak. A far more important—because extremely critical—compilation is the immortal *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Al-Bukhārī, another great opponent of the *ra’y*-principle, followed by the almost equally valuable *Ṣaḥīḥ* of his contemporary, Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, and other collections of lesser merit. Nevertheless, even with the enormous amount of material at their disposal, the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*—as they are called in distinction from the *aṣḥāb ar-ra’y*, who admitted the legal validity of a great legist’s personal opinion—could not entirely dispense with deductions based on *qiyās* (which, as already mentioned, is but a specific form of *ra’y*): for, in their endeavour to draw *all* legal opinions within the orbit of the *sharī’ah*, they were often compelled to construct quite artificial analogies between some of the actual cases before them and the occasional directives (often expressed in very general terms) given by the Prophet to his Companions.

The most brilliant exponent of the *ra’y*-school was undoubtedly Imām Abū Ḥanīfah. In the ‘Irāqī school of thought which goes under his name (and which derives, often mistakenly, all its authority from this great name) legal opinions are frequently subordinated to the principle of *istiḥsān* (social or moral preference) in which the social conditions and usages *prevalent at the time* were of prime importance. Very similar to this concept is the principle of *istiṣlāḥ* (“looking for what is most beneficial”, i.e., to the individual and the community) adopted with special insistence by the Mālikī school of thought with a view to serving the interests of the *ummah* as visualised at the time in question.

With all this, the upholders of the *ra’y*-principle knew fully well that an individual may occasionally err while endeavouring to discover and to interpret the Law-Giver’s supposed intentions; and so they assumed, quite logically, that the possibility of such errors would be greatly reduced if a large number of learned men agreed upon a particular interpretation or deduction. Thus, the consensus of competent scholars—termed *ijmā’*—came to be recognised as a *further* means of “establishing” doubtful points of law.

The real father of this method was Imām Mālik ibn Anas, the founder of the Ḥijāzī school of *fiqh*. Resting on the supposition that the views and usages prevalent at Medina in his time (the second century A.H.) reflected the attitude of the Companions

more faithfully than could have been possible anywhere else, he made the *ijmā'* (consensus of opinion) of the learned and pious men of that city the cornerstone of his legal edifice. With the rapid extension of this principle to all other centres of learning, a new era of *fiqh* was ushered in.

Now the *ijmā'* of the Companions, whenever historically established, had always been regarded by the Muslims as legally binding in the full sense of these words. But sometimes it happened that several of the Companions had interpreted one and the same matter—be it in the domain of law or of theology—in different ways; and the scholars of later centuries, aiming as they did at a conclusive and universally-binding structure of law in *all* matters, felt obliged to “harmonise” such conflicting views by diverse mental processes—an attempt which, by itself, often led to *new* conflicts of opinion: for, the particular process of “harmonisation” suggested by one scholar did not in every case recommend itself to other scholars. In order to overcome this difficulty, the principle of *ijmā'*—in earlier times implying the consensus of *all* scholars—was gradually limited to *the consensus of the scholars of a particular period*: a fairly arbitrary procedure. But even this was not enough to overcome the difficulties alluded to: simply because it never happened, and never could happen, that all learned men of any one period were agreed upon all the points under consideration. Consequently, a further latitude was given to the concept of *ijmā'* by defining it as the consensus of the *majority* of the learned men of a particular period. . . . Some legists went even beyond this and declared that not only the consensus of scholars, but also the consensus, over a sufficiently long span of time, of large groups of common people constitutes a legally-binding *ijmā'*. A glaring example of this peculiar concept of *vox populi* adopted by later Muslims is the justification, on the grounds of a so-called “popular” *ijmā'*, of the worship of saints and their tombs in many Muslim countries. Although this practice is in conflict with all the true concepts of Islam, it is often maintained that it cannot possibly be wrong since most of the Muslims accept it!

This absurd development was the result of a complete misunderstanding of the Prophet's saying, “Never will God make all my community agree on a wrong course” (Tirmidhī). Many scholars concluded from this *hadīth* that whatever the community—or at least the majority within it—agrees upon *must* be the right course.

However, it does not require any special erudition to see that this conclusion is entirely unjustified. The Prophet's saying is negative, and not positive. He meant exactly what he said, namely, that at no time would *all* Muslims pursue a wrong course: always there would be individuals or groups among them who would disagree with the erring ones and would insist on taking the right course, majority or no majority.

If we bear in mind that *ijmā'*, in its proper connotation, does not—and need not—touch upon problems laid down in unequivocal terms in either of the Two Sources but relates only to points where no such unequivocal ruling is forthcoming, we find that beyond the period of the Companions the history of Islam does not furnish a single instance of a real *ijmā'*, either in the sense of an agreement among *all* Muslim scholars or even among those of a particular period. Apart from the atmosphere of historical unreality in which this concept perseveres, some of the most outstanding Islamic scholars, like Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, Dā'ūd ibn Khalaf, Ibn Ḥazm, and later Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn al-Qayyim (to name only some of the greatest of them) hotly contested the *shar'ī* validity of any *ijmā'* whatsoever: they saw in it only a multiplication of individual *ra'y*, unjustly sanctified merely because it was (or could be) backed by sheer numbers. But in spite of this opposition—which did not cease for a single moment throughout the last thirteen centuries—the principle of *ijmā'* was admitted by the majority of Muslim legists as having legal force.

Thus, from the third or fourth century A.H. onwards, the original distinction between the *naṣṣ* ordinances of the *sharī'ah*, on the one hand, and the manifold results of learned *ijtihād* (of every description), on the other, began to lose its erstwhile clarity for the ordinary run of Muslim “laymen” as well as the ordinary run of *fuqahā'*: that is to say, the Law was henceforth conceived by them as being a combination of the *naṣṣ* ordinances *plus* a legislation arrived at through deduction. Or, to put it more precisely, instead of the original *Two Sources* or roots (*uṣūl*) of the Law—the Qur'ān and the Sunnah—the Muslims were presented with *four* roots: Qur'ān, Sunnah, *ijmā'* and *qiyās*; and only a small minority of scholars continued to oppose this arbitrary addition.

But notwithstanding the smallness of this minority opposition, it was, and is, based on perfectly sound logical grounds. According to all psychological canons, *qiyās* and *ijmā'* are necessarily subjec-

tive, and cannot result in anything but *opinions*. No human opinion—by whatever mental process obtained—can claim to objective validity, because different minds frequently arrive at different conclusions about one and the same matter. Not every opinion regarded as conclusive by one scholar need appear equally convincing to another scholar, or even to an educated layman. So it was at the time of the Companions, and so it has remained ever since: with the sole difference that the Companions, living in the intellectually stimulating presence of the Apostle of God, were fully aware of the *relativity* of human thought-processes, whereas most of the Muslim scholars after the second or third century A.H. overlooked this point completely. They went on and on, “evolving” new, supposedly *shar’i* laws by means of *qiyās*, *ra’y*, *istiḥ-sān*, *istidlāl*, *istiḥslāh*, *ta’lil*,* *ijmā’*, and several other methods of *ijtihād*—so that out of the comparatively small, compact body of the Law as it had presented itself to the Companions there arose that vast structure of *fiqhī* thought that confronts us today.

In brief, the labours of the early legists resulted in an imposing, many-sided edifice of legal concepts—so imposing and so many-sided, indeed, that in the course of time it became impossible for the average Muslim to find his way through the labyrinth of all those complicated mental processes and to obtain a first-hand grasp of the *sharī’ah*, or what now conventionally goes by this name. The difficulty became still greater as soon as, in addition to purely legal problems, questions of *belief* entered the forum in the shape of the theological philosophy called *kalām*: for this new discipline, so abstruse and complicated, patterned on Neo-Platonic philosophy, became a very fruitful field of controversy. We see a great diversity of opinions ranging over a great area of problems: for instance, whether the Qur’ān was eternally co-existent with God and, therefore, “uncreated”—or whether it was created by God at the moment of its revelation to the Prophet; whether all expressions in the Qur’ān (including those which common sense recognises as allegorical) should be taken in their literal sense, or whether they are accessible to interpretation; alternatively, some schools of thought claimed the right of arbitrary interpretation

* This term denotes the arbitrary attribution of a particular cause or purpose—not mentioned as such in the Qur’ān or the Sunnah—to any *shar’i* injunction, and the construing, on the basis of such an arbitrary assumption, of further “laws” by means of analogy.

even in matters which—as common sense makes obvious—ought to be accepted in their literal sense, being obviously *not* allegorical. All these and many other differences of opinion were often fought out with great, now almost incomprehensible bitterness, and led to the formation of numerous hostile factions indicting one another as “heretical”; and Muslim history offers many a tragic incident of mutual persecution, resulting from differences in the field of *kalām*, with the help of the political powers of the time.

For the time being, however, we are not so much concerned with *kalām* as with *fiqh*; and to *fiqh* our attention must return. We have already observed that a huge amount of subjective reasoning contributed to the development of *fiqh*; and when subjective elements crop into a legal system, the latter cannot possibly remain uniform.

It did not remain uniform. Ever since the third century A.H., the world of Islam has offered a depressing spectacle of legal and theological dissension. Gradually, however, these differences of opinion became more and more crystallised, and distinct, sharply-outlined schools of thought, called *madhāhib* (sing., *madhhab*), came into prominence. Apart from the far-reaching and fundamental split between Sunnī and Shī’ī Muslims, it is a popular mistake, by no means confined to so-called “laymen”, to assume that there had always been only *four* schools of thought in Sunnī Islam; as a matter of fact, there have been many more—but most of them are known today only to the historian: simply because the teachings of certain scholars somehow appealed to a greater number of people, whereas the views of other scholars, who did not command a similar appeal, were in the course of time relegated to oblivion. As regards the remaining four (Ḥanafī, Mālikī, Shāfi’ī and Ḥanbalī) schools, their differences were step by step softened through an agreement on the essential principles (*uṣūl*) supposed to regulate legal reasoning, while a certain amount of diversity was “permitted” in the legal details (*furū’*). This was an outcome of an instinctive tendency, at all times present in the Muslim community, to safeguard the cultural unity of Islam.

But this unity was obtained, and maintained, at a very heavy price: the stoppage of all living thought in matters of theology and law.

XI. IMITATION OF THOUGHT

WE HAVE seen that one idea is common to all the *madhāhib* which command a popular following among the Sunnī Muslims of our days: the conception that the *sharī'ah* is meant to embrace the life of Muslims not only as a dominating *outline of conduct*, but includes also a host of most minute regulations, arrived at by deduction and extending over each and every detail of our individual and social existence. It goes without saying that in a concept of such a magnitude none can obtain a sure footing unless he devotes himself to a lifelong, specialised study of the subject. Obviously, this is not within everybody's possibilities; and so the knowledge and the exposition of the *sharī'ah* has become the exclusive domain of a comparatively restricted class of scholars. Ordinary people, only insufficiently acquainted with the intricacies of *fiqh* (as it has developed over the centuries), have supposedly no choice but to rely blindly, whenever a question of Islamic Law arises, on the individual opinions of scholars of the past who are reputed to possess the requisite, specialised learning. The higher a person's reputation for learning, the greater the number of people prepared to accept his views as authoritative, without troubling—or even being able—to investigate their validity by themselves.

This is how it has come about that for centuries past the majority of Muslims have been practicing *taqlid* (literally, "garlanding", i.e., investing with authority): in the words of the classical philologists, this means "a person's following another in what he says or does, firmly believing him to be right therein, *without consideration of proof or evidence*" (Lane's *Lexicon*, Vol. VII, p. 2557). It goes without saying that this practice is an antithesis to a Muslim's duty of thinking and reflecting which is so unambiguously stressed in the Qur'an. Nevertheless, the practical inability of the average man or

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woman to form opinions on the basis of a mountain of legal material that has grown far too large for a layman's comprehension has led to a general acceptance of *taqlid* as a kind of "religious obligation"—and this notwithstanding the vehement rejection of this practice by some of the most brilliant minds in Islam.

For, throughout the history of Islam, many scholars have vigorously opposed the principle and the practice of blind *taqlid*; and herein we have another confirmation of that prophetic utterance, "Never will God make all my community agree on a wrong course." From the earliest times down to our own days, some of the greatest scholars of Islam have denounced the practice of *taqlid* as being opposed to the spirit of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. I should like to quote in this connection names like Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Al-Bukhārī, Dā'ūd ibn 'Alī az-Zahirī, Ibn Ḥazm, Al-Juwaynī, Fakhr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī, Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah; in more recent times, Shāh Walī Allāh of Delhi, Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb of Najd, Muḥammad ibn 'Alī ash-Shawkānī, Muḥammad ibn 'Alī as-Sanūsī, Ismā'il Shahīd; and their spiritual successors of later days, Jamāl ad-Dīn al-Afghānī and Muḥammad 'Abduh. All of these men, and many lesser luminaries besides them, strove against *taqlid* and for the re-establishment of *ijtihād* to its rightful position. Their view has been defined in a truly classical manner by Ibn al-Qayyim, and I can do no better than to quote his words. He begins his argument with the Qur'an-verse: "Whenever God and His Apostle have decided a matter, it is not for a believing man or woman to follow another course of his or her choice" (*sūrah* 33:36): thus, every clear ordinance of the Qur'an and the Sunnah is eternally binding on every Muslim. But beyond that:

"... there is freedom of choice regarding the views of anybody else in matters where the Law-Giver's command is not self-evident... and therefore it is permissible, but not obligatory, to follow anybody else's conclusions... Whoever refuses to accept such individual conclusions cannot be said to be guilty of disobedience to God and His Apostle... Nobody has the right to 'make' *sharī* laws side by side with the Law of the Prophet, ... and if any person arrives at conclusions or establishes certain rules in the light of his own understanding and interpretation [of

the Two Sources], the community is not bound to follow him.”*

None the less, the endeavours of these independent thinkers met with only limited success. To incline towards the easier of two possible courses is but human, and *taqlid* is certainly easier than *ijtihād*, for it comfortably evades individual responsibility for one's own doings and places its burden on the shoulders of one or another of the Great Old Men of the past.

The Muslim community cannot rightly be blamed for this development, for, in the face of the extraordinary multitude and complexity of the laws and problems nowadays *supposed* to be involved in the *shari'ah*, the “common man” may be excused if he shrinks back from the task of forming his own opinion in every case that arises. To know that the Qur'ān and the Sunnah, taken together, constitute the mainspring of all Islamic reasoning is one thing—but to be able to construct, independently, out of these sources a complete legal system covering all aspects of life is quite another. Again and again, the average Muslim who is eager to derive his own, practical conclusions from the Two Sources stumbles over the very immensity of the scope ascribed to the *shari'ah*; and since he himself is not a scholar of high rank, he is obliged, willy-nilly, to rely on what the scholars tell him, without being able to verify their findings in each and every case. Thus, whether he accepts the principle of *taqlid* or—in theory—rejects it, he is virtually forced to depend on some sort of *taqlid* in practice: that is, he feels *obliged* to accept some learned man's sayings. The learned man in question is always the intermediate teacher; and, for all practical purposes, it is fairly irrelevant whether that intermediary claims to propound the views of, say, Imām Abū Ḥanīfah, or to base his conclusions directly on the Two Sources: in either case the layman is, as a rule, unable to verify his teacher's claim. Consequently, the difference between the layman who “accepts” and one who “rejects” the principle of *taqlid* becomes very subtle—so subtle that it can hardly be called a difference at all.

In the purely intellectual field, the principle and the practice of *taqlid* into which the Muslim community has been driven opened the way to a most deplorable development: namely, that blind worship of “authorities” which has ever since pervaded Muslim society

* Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Zād al-Ma'ād*, Cairo 1347 A.H., Vol. I, p. 5.

and was destined to have such a paralysing effect on Muslim cultural life in the past centuries. Similar to the “Fathers” of the Christian Church, we have in Muslim history that large (if not so clearly outlined) group of learned men known as *ahl as-salaf aṣ-ṣāliḥ*—the “early, pious generations”—whom the Muslims have been taught to regard as almost infallible. By giving them a common designation, the illusion has been created that their views were more or less identical; but nothing could be farther from the truth. Among those great and pious men, who certainly have rendered most valuable services to the cause of Islamic learning, there existed the deepest differences of opinion in almost all questions of importance. For, every one of those early scholars of Islam tried to reach, in the light of his own understanding, conclusions as to the Law-Giver's aims with regard to the moral and practical behaviour of the Muslims. Those conclusions were often contradictory—for, as I have repeatedly stressed—they were conditioned by the individual working of most diverse intellects and by the social environment and the philosophical notions of their own times. But most of the scholars of later generations, almost drowned in the oceanic width to which *fiqh* and *kalām* had attained in the course of a few centuries, resolutely refused to see the time-bound quality inherent in man's thoughts. They set themselves to the task of an artificial “harmonisation” of the ideas expressed by the *ahl as-salaf aṣ-ṣāliḥ*, and made unquestioning reliance on their authority into a “postulate” of Islam itself. Since then, the overwhelming majority of Muslims have been practicing, and believing in the necessity of, *taqlid*; and even scholars who by virtue of their training are in a position to reach independent opinions in the domain of the Law, nowadays modestly reserve for themselves the right of *ijtihād* only on questions of minor detail within the framework of one or another of the established *madhāhib*.

Locked in habitual *taqlid*, Muslim intellectual and social life fell, from the fourth century A.H. onwards, into complete stagnation. Religious concepts ceased to be “conceived”: they were simply taken over in a stereotyped form from generation to generation. Whatever error of thought one or another of the *ahl as-salaf aṣ-ṣāliḥ* might have committed was unquestioningly incorporated in the structure of conventional *fiqh*, and hardly a door was left open for later corrections. To the masses of common people this must have been very convenient. But it is almost incomprehen-

sible how so many 'ulamā' could have indulged in this orgy of blind imitation. It does not seem to have occurred to them that however great those "early generations" of Muslim scholars might have been, later times might bring forth intellects of equal brilliance which would have at their disposal not only all the material and all the scholarly apparatus which had been available to the "early generations" but would have, in addition, a greater amount of historical, psychological and scientific experience upon which to draw.

Under the impact of the principle of *taqlid*, clothed in the garb of veneration of the early scholars, the range of Islamic ideas was forcibly limited to that existing in the first three or four centuries of Islam; and the justifiable respect which every Muslim feels for those great and righteous men of the past was made into a vehicle of, and an excuse for, intellectual laziness in problems of theology and law. In any other civilisation, this would have merely diminished the importance of religion as a form-giving element in social life: but in Islamic civilisation, which had been built on religious considerations and ideas to the exclusion of everything else, the petrification of religious thought was bound to suffocate the very spirit of life.

XII. A VOICE FROM NINE HUNDRED YEARS AGO

THE READER should not suppose that the views propounded by me are an unheard-of innovation in Muslim legal thought. As we have already seen, they were held by the Prophet's Companions themselves as well as by their immediate successors and, after them, by some of the greatest scholars of Islam—and particularly by the man who is justly regarded as one of the three or four most brilliant minds which the Muslim world has ever produced: Abū Muḥammad ibn Ḥazm of Cordoba (384–456 A.H.). To the world at large he is known as the founder of the science of Comparative Religion, which he expounded in his fundamental work called *Kitāb al-Faṣl fi'l-Milal wa'n-Nihal* ("On the Discrimination between Religious Communities and Sects"): a work that ushered in an entirely new era in the study of religions. But here we are concerned with another aspect of his creative intellect, namely, with his numerous writings on *fiqh* and the *shari'ah*, in which he attacked the conventional ideas prevailing in his time and endeavoured to free the concept of the Divine Law from the subjective elements that had intruded into it, so that it might be restored to the purity and compactness which it had possessed at the time of the Companions. Nothing could be more illustrative with regard to the problem that we are discussing than the following passages from the Introduction to his great work, *Al-Muḥallā*:

"It is not permissible, in matters of religious law (*dīn*), to resort to deductions by analogy (*qiyās*) or to personal opinions (*ra'y*)—for there is no doubt that God has commanded us to refer all problems to His Divine Writ and to the Sunnah of His Apostle whenever a disagreement arises [an allusion to *sūrah*

This Law of Ours

4:59]; and whoever refers such a problem to *qiyās* or *ta'līl* or *ra'y* offends against God's command. . . . [For] God has said, 'No single thing have We neglected in Our decree' [*sūrah* 6:38]; and ' . . . so that thou [O Muḥammad] might make clear unto mankind all that has ever been thus bestowed upon them from on high' [*sūrah* 16:44]; and [finally] He said, 'Today have I perfected your religious law for you' [*sūrah* 5:3]: and all this implies an utter rejection of *qiyās* and *ra'y*. For, even the upholders of *qiyās* and *ra'y* do not deny that it is not permissible to resort to these methods in cases where there exists a *naṣṣ* injunction. On the other hand, God Himself has testified that nothing has been omitted in the *naṣṣ*: further, that the Apostle of God has clearly shown to men what has been made binding on them; and, finally, that the religious law had indeed been completed [in the Prophet's life-time]: and thus it is established that the *naṣṣ* ordinances comprise the religious law in its entirety. If this is so, there is no need for anybody to resort to deductions by analogy or to personal opinions, be they his own or somebody else's.

"And now let us ask those who favour *qiyās* [in *shar'ī* matters]: 'Do you maintain that each and every deduction arrived at by means of *qiyās* is correct—or are there correct as well as wrong deductions?' It is obviously impossible to answer, 'Each and every *qiyās* is correct'—for we know that those who resort to *qiyās* frequently contradict and refute each other: and it is impossible that in a question as to what is *ḥarām* (prohibited) and what is *ḥalāl* (allowed) a Yes and a No could be equally valid. . . . But if the answer is, 'No—some of the *qiyās*-deductions are correct and some of them wrong,' I should like them to let us know by what criterion a sound *qiyās* could be discerned from an unsound one: but they have nothing to show by way of such a criterion. Now, if there is no criterion whereby it could be once and for all established what sort of *qiyās* should be regarded as sound and what as unsound, the whole of this method stands self-condemned as being based on an untenable claim. . . . How could God have demanded of us that we should resort to deductions by analogy—and have omitted to show us *wherein* to apply analogy, and *how* to apply it, and what its *standards* should be? Such a demand would be inconceivable . . . for, 'God does not burden any human being with more than he is able to bear' [*sūrah* 2:286].

"And if [in order to justify their claims to *qiyās* and *ta'līl*] the upholders of these methods quote Qur'ān-verses or *aḥādīth* containing comparisons [i.e., analogies] between one thing and another, or declaring that God has ordained such-and-such a thing for such-and-such a reason—the answer is this: 'All that God or His Apostle have mentioned by way of comparison or cause is truth absolute, and none may go against it: but this, precisely, is the *naṣṣ* on which we rely! On the other hand, your attempts at imitating Him in matters of religious legislation, and your ascribing of 'causes' [to *shar'ī* ordinances] beyond what God and His Apostle have made manifest by means of *nuṣūṣ*—all this is utterly wrong: a way which God has not permitted us to go' . . .

"All upholders of *qiyās* contradict each other in their deductions; and you will not find a single problem of law in which the *qiyās* of one group of scholars, claimed by them to be right, is not diametrically opposed to a *qiyās* evolved by another group. All of them agree that not each and every *qiyās* could possibly be sound, and not each and every *ra'y* true; but whenever we call upon them to produce an objective criterion which would enable us to discriminate between a sound *qiyās*, *ra'y* or *ta'līl*, on the one hand, and a bad *qiyās*, *ra'y* or *ta'līl*, on the other—they merely stutter in confusion. Whenever one presses them on this point, the futility of all their claims becomes manifest: for they are absolutely unable to give a sensible answer. . . .

"And so we tell them: The *naṣṣ* [of the Qur'ān and the Sunnah] is absolute truth; but what you are aiming at—namely, at arbitrary additions to the *naṣṣ*-laws by means of your personal opinion—is utterly wrong. . . ."

* Ibn Ḥazm, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 56 ff.

XIII. CREATIVE ACCEPTANCE

IN ORDER to make Islam's "social contract" practicable in our times as well, we must—like the earliest followers of the Prophet—divest ourselves entirely of the thought-habits of our decadent past and learn, once more, to look upon the original *sharī'ah* as the complete conceptual basis of a programme offered to us by God Himself for acceptance or rejection.

But no acceptance of the *sharī'ah* can be truly sound unless it is a conscious, creative acceptance. There can be no question of a "social contract" unless we *understand*, directly and in detail, what the clauses of that contract are: that is, unless the whole contracting community understands it.

The Qur'ān propounded an ethical teaching and a Law: and the Prophet, acting under Divine inspiration, exemplified both and gave them a concrete aspect: and so the complete *sharī'ah* of Islam was ushered into existence with the words: "Today I have perfected your religious law for you. . . ." (*sūrah* 5:3).

Thus the work of the Law-Giver was completed. But the conceptions which we—the community—form of the material offered to us in the legal and moral teachings of Islam, and the practical use which we make of those conceptions are *our* contribution towards Islamic life. Without such a contribution from us, the "Islamic programme" must remain a stillborn proposition. In short, we need a new *ijtihād*.

We frequently hear the objection that *ijtihād*—salutary as it may be in times of vigorous cultural life—is dangerous in times of decay because it might give rise to further differences of thought, and even to a breaking-up of the remnants of Muslim solidarity: but I must confess that I cannot conceive of a sillier objection. If it be true—and it *is* true—that the opposite of *ijtihād*, namely *taqlid*,

has been responsible for the petrification of Muslim thought and, consequently, for the drying-up of all our cultural vitality, then it is obvious that nothing but a re-establishment of legitimate *ijtihād* can cure our illness. To object to it on the grounds of our present decay is like objecting to the administration of vitamins to a person suffering from scurvy or beri-beri or any other disease caused by lack of vitamins. Any medical man will tell you that such a patient can be saved only if he is given the vitamins in which his body is deficient; but our professional sermonisers seem to be saying, "Let us wait until he recovers from scurvy, and then we shall consider an administration of vitamins." This is sheer nonsense, and we should not be afraid of exposing it as such. Our patient—the world of Islam—urgently needs the vitamin of *ijtihād*. If we desire to keep him alive, we must give it to him: but at the same time we must take care not to give him an overdose—which means, in plain words, that we must apply our *ijtihād* within the bounds clearly demarcated by the Two Sources of Islam and, further, that we must not apply it to the *sharī'ah* proper, which is Divine in its origin and therefore beyond any mortal's *ijtihād*.

"Very strange," you will say. "You want us to exercise our *ijtihād* but in the same breath you stipulate that it should not be exercised in the sphere of the *sharī'ah* as such! Where, then, shall we exercise it?"

And now it is my turn to ask: "Would it not be advisable first to make up our minds, once and for all, as to what the *sharī'ah* really is?"

It cannot be doubted that the Companions of the Prophet looked upon the observance of the *sharī'ah* as the indivisible, guiding principle in a Muslim's life. We have already seen that whenever they could not find a *naṣṣ* ordinance illuminating a particular point of law in either the Qur'ān or the Sunnah, they exerted their common sense in order to reach a legal decision which would conform to the spirit of the Law; but they never committed the mistake of regarding their own *ijtihād* as being valid for everybody and for all times. On the understanding that the Law itself was precise and obvious, they identified *fiqh* with a person's ability to exercise his intelligence in matters where no *shar'ī* provision was available. In admitting the possibility of legitimate differences of opinion—a possibility amply illustrated even in the earliest history of Islam—the Companions made a clear distinction between the Eternal Law

of Islam, the *sharī'ah*, and all time-bound legislation based on individual deductions from the Two Sources. If they ever considered *ijmā'* in this context, they did so only in the sense of an agreement on a particular course of action, and *not in the sense as to what should be law*: for to them the Law, being based on *naṣṣ*, was self-evident and unequivocal and therefore required no interpretations, no *ijmā'*, no *qiyās*, no *ra'y*—in short, no *ijtihād* of any kind.

Now it would be a mistake to believe—as many non-Muslim orientalists would like us to believe—that this simplicity of the Companions' conception and definition of the *sharī'ah* was due to some supposed “naïveté” in their outlook—in its turn an outcome of the patriarchal simplicity of their lives and their comparative isolation from the more sophisticated countries around them. No: their clear-cut attitude in juridical matters was based on the realisation that the cases and ordinances stipulated in the *nuṣūṣ* of the Two Sources had never been *intended* to cover all possible constellations and complexities of human life, and that, therefore, the *sharī'ah* as such is concise, clear-cut and open to every mature, sane mind. In contrast, our self-appointed “guardians of Islam” tell us now—as they have been telling us for centuries—that the *sharī'ah* is far too complex to be accessible to a “layman's” understanding. On the other hand, however, there is abundant evidence that the Law-Giver *intended* it to be accessible to every believer's direct understanding inasmuch as it represents the ideology on which the believer's life must be consciously based. Therefore, the complexity now, and for centuries past, inherent in the conventional concept of the *sharī'ah* must somehow be resolved into simplicity. This is my Proposition Number One.

But such a simplicity is obviously impossible as long as the *sharī'ah* is supposed to comprise, besides the *naṣṣ* ordinances of the Two Sources, a great number of other regulations derived by various scholars through *ijtihādī* thought—in which term is comprised *qiyās* (deduction by analogy), *ra'y* (subjective opinion), *istiḥsān* (moral or social preference), *istidlāl* (inference), *ijmā'* (consensus of opinion), and several other methods of deductive reasoning. Therefore, the results of *ijtihādī* thought, even of the greatest Muslim scholars, cannot be admitted as being components of the *sharī'ah* code: which is my Proposition Number Two.

However, an amplification of the *naṣṣ* ordinances through *ijtihādī* thought is unavoidable so long as we assume that the Law-

Giver meant the *sharī'ah* to cover every imaginable action and contingency, and not merely the specific actions and contingencies clearly outlined in the *nuṣūṣ* of the Two Sources. Therefore, we are bound to conclude that the above assumption is erroneous, and that the *sharī'ah* was never meant to cover anything beyond what has been stipulated in the actual, clear-cut *naṣṣ* ordinances of the Qur'ān and the Sunnah. Reduced to plain terms, this amounts to the statement that the scope commonly ascribed to the *sharī'ah* is far in excess of the scope intended for it by the Law-Giver: and this is my Proposition Number Three.

A revolutionary opinion, you will say? In a sense it is. It is revolutionary in so far as it runs counter to the usage of centuries—but otherwise it is not revolutionary at all. It is, on the contrary, a very orthodox and ancient opinion—so ancient, indeed, that it jumps backwards over the last thousand years or so, beyond the conservatism of the self-appointed “guardians of our faith”, beyond even the early generations of Islamic scholars—back to the time which we regard as the most glorious, most truly Islamic: the time of the Prophet's Companions, the time of the Prophet himself.

It is an opinion dictated by humility: an opinion which refuses to believe that the Law-Giver could have omitted to state clearly and unambiguously, *in terms of law*, whatever He intended to be a law: an opinion which refuses to believe that God Almighty and His Apostle intended the *sharī'ah* of Islam to be a sort of puzzle, to be laboriously solved by means of a variety of deductions and inferences: an opinion, in short, based on the concept that the *sharī'ah*, intended as it was to be the eternal, immutable basis of Muslim life, could not have been made dependent on exertions of the fallible human intellect; and that, therefore, the *naṣṣ* ordinances of the Qur'ān and the Sunnah—comparatively few as they are—constitute the sum-total of the *sharī'ah* in its true and eternal sense.

XIV. SUMMING UP

BEFORE WE consider the full implications of this finding—which, as I have repeatedly shown, is no new finding at all—let us answer the question that must have troubled the reader since he began to read these pages:

If it is true that the *sharī'ah* consists only of the *naṣṣ* ordinances of the Qur'ān and the Sunnah, how did it happen that so many of the great scholars of the "early generations", most of whom possessed really first-class intellects—extended its range far beyond the limits which we now claim for it, and postulated *ijtihād* in its various forms as a legitimate means of establishing *shar'ī* laws?

It would be ridiculous to suppose that those "early generations" were less aware of the intentions of the Law-Giver than we are. But—as I have said before—we must bear in mind the peculiar times in which they lived: the times when Aristotelian metaphysics, Gnosticism, Manichaeism, esoteric Neo-Platonism and God knows what other philosophies exerted their full impact on the young world of Islam and contended for supremacy over the Muslim mind; when Byzantino-Roman Law, encountered in Syria and North Africa, threatened to influence and undermine the thought of Muslim *fuqahā'*; when new notions and new findings in mathematics, physics and astronomy were opening unexpected avenues of metaphysical speculation which, in turn, frequently went against the metaphysical statements of the Qur'ān and of the Apostle of God; when Christian mysticism, intellectually enriched by acquisitions from Iran and India, imperceptibly entered the realm of Muslim thought and began to throw a hazy veil over the crystal-clear teachings of the Arabian Prophet. What wonder, then, that those great scholars of Islam endeavoured to establish a legal system which would embrace Muslim life in its entirety and thus

Summing Up

safeguard it against all those undesirable influences? They knew that the *naṣṣ* ordinances of the Two Sources are limited in their purport: naturally so, because they were never intended to provide more than the *basic* Law of Islam—permitting, and demanding, the exercise of our *ijtihād* as a means of establishing, under the shadow of this Eternal Law, a *temporal* law which could grow, change and develop in accordance with the needs of the time and the growth of man's experience. Thus, the *ijtihād* of the great scholars of our past was not only legitimate but salutary. They fought for the religious and cultural continuity of Islam: and, to a large extent, they succeeded. If they committed a mistake, it was only in believing (and only very few of them believed it) that the results of their *ijtihād* could remain valid for all times to come; and, as I have pointed out before, even that mistake was excusable on the grounds of the insufficient knowledge of human psychology at the times in question. It is our fault, not theirs, that we have remained satisfied with their findings for fully a thousand years; that we have stopped thinking for ourselves; and that we have come to regard the *fiqhī* structure evolved in the past as being part of the *sharī'ah* itself.

Now such an attitude conflicts with the already-mentioned fundamental statement in the Qur'ān: "Today have I perfected your religious law for you" (*sūrah* 5:3)—for this statement clearly shows that whatever was meant to be a *shar'ī* law had been made obvious as such in the Qur'ān and the Prophet's Sunnah *in his own lifetime*. Consequently, whatever is laid down as law in either of the Two Sources is not open to individual discretion; and, correspondingly, whatever is open to one's discretion cannot be regarded as a *shar'ī* law. On the basis of this principle, we must conclude that the independent reasoning of *any* person below the Prophet may legitimately refer only to something which is not explicitly, *per se*, laid down in terms of Divine Law: that is to say, it can lead to no more than the evolution of a *temporal*, amendable Muslim Law subordinated to the *sharī'ah* and open to the community's discretion—to be accepted or rejected as the case may be. As long as we remain conscious of the fact that *ijtihād* can provide only a temporal, changeable legislation *in addition to* the unchangeable Law of Islam, the *sharī'ah*, our endeavours in this respect are not only legitimate but strongly recommended by the Prophet himself. They are, in brief, the "plus" which a believer's own spirit and will must add to the guidance offered to us in the Two Sources.

In questions of belief, this *ijtihādī* “plus” to the *shar‘ī* Law must be regarded as a matter of personal conscience. In other words, while a Muslim must, if he wishes to be a Muslim in more than name, accept the *shar‘ah* as binding, he may—if he is able to do so—supplement this fundamental minimum by conclusions and deductions of his own, or follow another person’s deductions in so far as they appear to him convincing. The same applies to the *ijma‘* of learned men, which is nothing but group-*ijtihād* and, therefore, open to question and change.

In matters affecting our social actions and our communal legislation, on the other hand, “personal conscience” ceases to be a decisive factor of acceptance. For it is quite possible to conceive of instances where a group-decision—for example, a legal decision arrived at by the community’s chosen representatives—becomes binding on every member of the community, irrespective of whether he wholeheartedly approves of it or not: simply because the unity of communal decision and action is a paramount demand of Islam. But even then, such a decision can be binding only in the sense of being a temporal (and therefore amendable) law, and not in any *shar‘ī* sense. The *shar‘ī* factor enters into our acceptance of communal decisions only in so far as we are obliged, by the command of God and His Apostle, to respect the will of the community—provided, of course, that it does not go against the Law of Islam as such.

As I have pointed out elsewhere, there exists an overriding need for a codification of the *true* Islamic Law; and I have suggested a method by which this objective might be achieved.* Without such a codification, the Muslims must forever remain confused and deeply divided in their views as to how the spirit of Islam could be translated into the practical terms of socio-political life. But once its ordinances are codified, the *shar‘ah* will emerge as a very small code of laws; and because of the clearness and conciseness of their

* See Muhammad Asad, *The Principles of State and Government in Islam* (Dar al-Andalus, Gibraltar), pp. 100 ff. It should be borne in mind that the relevant passages were written in the context of a treatise on Islamic constitution-making, and have, therefore, been restricted to matters of public concern and man’s socio-political behaviour. However, the method suggested by me may, I believe, equally well be applied to a codification of *shar‘ī* laws bearing on *individual* attitudes and behaviour as well.

language, these laws will not require for their understanding any extraneous guidance—so that every intelligent Muslim, be he a scholar or a layman, will be in a position to find out for himself what the Law of Islam says about this or that problem. Freed from the many layers of fallible thought which have hitherto obscured its luminous clarity, the *shar‘ah* will once again assume its rightful position as the unchangeable, eternal constitution of Islam, the bedrock on which to build our communal existence. And in spite of the unchangeable character of its regulations, it will not be conducive to rigidity in our social and intellectual life: for it is intended to be no more than a *framework* of belief and behaviour, leaving the greatest possible scope for the unfolding of man’s God-given genius.

There is no other way to a cultural and spiritual recovery of the Muslim *ummah*. Simply talking about the need for a “re-birth” of faith is not much better than bragging about our glorious past and extolling the greatness of our predecessors. Our faith cannot be born unless we *understand what it implies* and to what practical goals it will lead us. It will not do us the least good if we are glibly assured that the socio-economic programme of Islam is better than that of socialism, communism, capitalism, fascism, and God knows what other “isms” which the West has produced for its own good or its own undoing. We ought rather to be *shown*, in unmistakable terms, what alternative proposals the *shar‘ah* makes for our social life, what its true concept of society is, what views it puts forward with regard to individual property and the communal good, labour and production, capital and profit, employer and employee, the state and the individual; what its practical measures are for the prevention of man’s exploitation by man; for an abolition of ignorance and poverty; for obtaining food, clothing and shelter for every man, woman and child. . . .

Now I do not mean to say that these material things of life are Islam’s sole concern; certainly they are not. For this religion of ours would not be God’s Message to man if its foremost goal were not man’s growth towards God: but our bodies and our souls are so intertwined that we cannot achieve the ultimate well-being of the one without taking the other fully into account. Specious sermonising about “faith” and “sacrifice” and “surrender to God’s Will” cannot lead to the establishment of true Islam on earth unless we are shown *how* to gain faith through a better insight into God’s

plan, *how* to elevate our spirit by living a righteous life, and *how* to surrender ourselves to God by doing His Will as individuals and as a community, so that we might *really* become “the best community that has ever been brought forth for [the good of] mankind” (*sūrah* 3:110).

Our way to that exalted status has been shown to us in the *sharī'ah*—but, as we now realise, the *sharī'ah* can never become effective unless it becomes an open book for *every one of us*. Unless and until our leaders—and the scholars who supposedly advise them—can clarify the difference between the real *sharī'ah* and what nowadays erroneously goes by that name, no truly Islamic polity can come into being, and all our efforts at achieving it, and all the pent-up longings within the hearts of so many millions of Muslims are doomed to frustration and bitter disillusionment.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY PAKISTAN?

(Published in *Arafat*, Lahore, May 1947)

Looking at Ourselves

SOME TIME ago—in the February issue of *Arafat*—I posed the question, “Do we really want Islam?” It was not just a rhetorical question meant for my readers’ edification, but one which we must actually ask ourselves: and the time has come when every one of us must face it squarely, examine all its implications with regard to our present and our future, and summon the moral courage to answer it with an honest Yes or an equally honest No. As things stand at present, innumerable Muslims say Yes with their lips and No with their actions: that is, they frequently talk of Islam and assert, with all the marks of deep-set conviction, that it is the best possible way of life—the *only* way of life, indeed, which could save mankind from its mad rush towards self-annihilation—and that, therefore, it is the only goal worth striving for: while in their personal concerns and in their social behaviour they drift farther and farther away from Islam. At no time in our modern history was there so much talk of Islam as in contemporary India; and at no time was there less effort on the part of the Muslims to shape their individual lives and their communal affairs in accordance with the spirit of Islam.

Some of you will perhaps, at this juncture, be moved to protest against my assertion, and will point to the great enthusiasm which the Pakistan idea has created among the Muslims of this sub-continent. You will say—and rightly so—that the Muslims of India have at last awakened from their political torpor and have achieved a greater unanimity of purpose than ever before; that they have become fully conscious of having a separate cultural identity based on their being *Muslims*; that the foremost slogan of the Pakistan movement is *lā ilāha ill'Allāh*; that they are imbued with the

desire to establish political forms in which the Muslim world-view, Muslim ethics and Muslim social concepts could find their full expression: and you will ask me, in a somewhat aggrieved voice, whether I count all this for nothing from the Islamic point of view?

As a matter of fact, I do not "count all this for nothing"; I count it for very much indeed. I do believe (and have believed for about fourteen years) that there is no future for Islam in India until Pakistan becomes a reality; and that, if it becomes a reality here, it might bring about a spiritual revolution in the whole Muslim world by proving that it is possible to establish an ideological, Islamic polity in our times no less than it was possible thirteen hundred years ago. But ask yourselves: Are all leaders of the Pakistan movement, and the intelligentsia which forms its spearhead, quite serious in their avowals that Islam, and nothing but Islam, provides the ultimate inspiration of their struggle? Are they really aware of what it implies when they say, "The objective of Pakistan is *lā ilāha ill' Allāh*? Do we all mean the same when we talk and dream of Pakistan?"

These are big questions—so big that they stand out far above the present turmoil, far even above the individual sufferings which so many Muslim men and women in this country are now undergoing: for an answer to these questions will decide whether those sufferings herald a new vision of the future—a complete vindication of Islam as a "practical proposition"—or merely an improvement, by means of a national Muslim state, of our community's economic situation.

I hope the reader will forgive me if I quote myself. In the February 1947 number of *Arafat* (p. 166) I wrote:

"The Pakistan movement . . . can become the starting-point of a new Islamic development if the Muslims realise—and continue realising it when Pakistan is achieved—that the real, historic justification of this movement does not consist in our dressing or talking or salaaming differently from the other inhabitants of the country, or in the grievances which we may have against other communities, or even in the desire to provide more economic opportunities and more elbow-room for people who—by sheer force of habit—call themselves 'Muslims': but that such a justification is to be found only in the Muslims' desire to establish a truly Islamic polity: in other words, to translate the tenets of

Islam into terms of practical life."

This, in short, is my conception of Pakistan; and I do not think that I am far wrong in assuming that it is the conception of many other Muslims as well. Of many: but not of all; and not even of most of them. For, by far the larger part of our intelligentsia do not seem to consider Pakistan in this light. To them, it means no more and no less than a way to freeing the Muslims of India from Hindu domination, and the establishment of a political structure in which the Muslim community would find its "place in the sun" in the economic sense. Islam comes into the picture only in so far as it happens to be the religion of the people concerned—just as Catholicism came into the picture in the Irish struggle for independence because it happened to be the religion of most Irishmen. And just as Irish Catholicism was, in the last analysis, merely an additional feature—an emotional accompaniment, as it were—of Irish nationalism, so the Islamic slogans of the Pakistan movement are in danger of becoming, to many Muslims, merely an emotional accompaniment to their struggle for communal "self-determination".

To put it bluntly, many of our brothers and sisters do not seem to care for the spiritual, *Islamic* objectives of Pakistan, and permit themselves to be carried away by sentiments not far removed from nationalism; and this is especially true of many Muslims educated on Western lines. Their indifference to Islam as a religion has grown considerably in the past decades; the duties which the *shari'ah* imposes on many have mostly become irksome to them; they are unable to think otherwise than in Western patterns of thought, and so they do not believe in their hearts that the world's social and political problems are capable of being subordinated to purely religious considerations. Hence, their approach to Islam is governed by convention rather than ideology, and amounts, at best, to a faintly "cultural" interest in their community's historical traditions. To such a mentality, the cry for Pakistan is just another national cry on the lines of "Egypt for the Egyptians" or "Czechoslovakia for the Czechoslovaks": namely, a demand for self-determination on the part of a group of people who have certain economic interests and certain cultural traits in common—one of those cultural traits being, in this case, our community's nominal adherence to Islam. Just that. No more, and no less.

Now this, you will admit, is a very poor view of Pakistan; a view, moreover, which does not do justice to the Islamic enthusiasm at present so markedly—if chaotically—displayed by the overwhelming masses of our common people. While many of our so-called intelligentsia are interested in Islam only in so far as it fits into their struggle for political self-determination, the common people most obviously desire self-determination for the sake of Islam as such: but, being inarticulate in their desire, and, as a rule, ignorant of the ways to its achievement, they naturally depend on the intelligentsia for leadership. The spiritual quality of that leadership will, ultimately, decide the quality of the Muslims' struggle for Pakistan—and the form which Pakistan itself will assume.

The Uniqueness of Pakistan

As far as the Muslim masses are concerned, the Pakistan movement is rooted in their instinctive feeling that they are an *ideological community* and have as such every right to an autonomous political existence. In other words, they feel and know that their communal existence is not—as with other communities—based on racial affinities or on the consciousness of cultural traditions held in common, but only—exclusively—on the fact of their common adherence to the ideology of Islam: and that, therefore, they must justify their communal existence by erecting a socio-political structure in which that ideology—the *shari'ah*—would become the visible expression of their nationhood.

This, and not a solution of the all-India problem of Muslim minorities, is the real, historic purpose of the Pakistan movement. In so far as there will always remain non-Muslim minorities in Pakistan as well as Muslim minorities in the rest of India, Pakistan cannot be said to solve the minorities problem in its entirety. But this is precisely a point which we—and our opponents—would do well to understand: the problem of minorities, however important in all considerations of India's political future, is, in itself, not fundamentally responsible for the Pakistan movement, but is rather an *incidental* accompaniment to the movement's intrinsic objective—the establishment of an Islamic polity in which our ideology could come to practical fruition. Only thus can we understand why the Muslims in, say, Bombay or Madras—who of course cannot expect that their provinces would become part of Pakistan—are as much

interested in its realisation as are the Muslims of the Punjab or of Bengal. They are interested in Pakistan not because they hope to come within its orbit in a territorial sense, but because they feel, as intensely as their brethren in the so-called "Muslim majority" provinces, that the birth of an Islamic polity in Pakistan would vindicate the claim that Islam is a practical proposition, and that the Muslims—*because* of their being Muslims—are a nation unto themselves, irrespective of their geographical location. And if non-Muslims object to this claim on the grounds that nowhere else in the world—not even in the rest of the Muslim world—does any group of people nowadays aspire to separate nationhood by virtue of its religious beliefs alone, we are entitled to answer them: "In that case, we are unique. So what?"

So what? Should we concede to others the right to decide what should and what should not constitute our nationhood? Should we be ashamed of the fact that our political ideals are entirely different from the present-day ideals of the Turks, the Egyptians, the Afghans, the Syrians or the Iranians? Should we not, rather, derive pride from the thought that we alone among all the Muslim peoples are now finding the way back to the concept of the *ummah* enunciated by the Greatest Man?

For, in this respect, the Pakistan movement is truly unique among all the political mass movements now evident anywhere in the Muslim world. No doubt, in the vast territories that go by this name there are many other lovers of Islam besides us; in almost every Muslim country there are selfless people who endeavour to propagate the Prophet's teachings and to raise the moral level of the community: but nowhere in the modern world, except in the Pakistan movement, has a whole Muslim nation set out on the march towards Islam. No mass movement anywhere else in the Muslim world owes its origin to a similar, Islamic inspiration on the part of the people; nor has any of the existing Muslim states a similar objective in view. Some of those states, like Turkey and Iran, are explicitly anti-Islamic in their governmental aims, and openly declare that Islam should be eliminated from politics and from the people's social life. But even those Muslim states in which religion is still being valued—in varying degrees—as a spiritual treasure, are "Islamic" only in so far as Islam is the religion professed by the majority of their inhabitants: while their political aims are not really governed by Islamic considerations but, rather, by what the

rulers or ruling classes conceive as “national” interests in exactly the sense in which national interests are conceived in the West. It is, therefore, impossible to expect of such political organisations—whether they be autocratic kingdoms like Saudi Arabia or Afghanistan, republics like Syria, or constitutional monarchies like Egypt and Iraq—any clear impetus in the direction of Islam. This does not, of course, mean that all the people or even the rulers of those countries are indifferent to Islam as such: it means no more and no less than that their attachment to Islam—genuine in many cases—has, for various historical reasons, no direct relation to the forms of their states and the aims of their governments.

In the Pakistan movement, on the other hand, there undoubtedly exists such a direct connection between the people’s attachment to Islam and their political aims. Rather more than that: the practical success of this movement is exclusively due to our people’s passionate, if as yet inarticulate, desire to have a state in which the forms and objectives of government would be determined by the ideological imperatives of Islam—a state, that is, in which Islam would not be just a religious and cultural “label” of the people concerned, but the very goal and purpose of state-formation. And it goes without saying that an achievement of such an Islamic state—the first in the modern world—would revolutionise Muslim political thought everywhere, and would probably inspire other Muslim peoples to strive towards similar ends; and so it might become a prelude to an Islamic reorientation in many parts of the world.

It is, thus, quite legitimate to say that the Pakistan movement contains a great promise for an Islamic revival; and as far as I can see, it offers almost the only hope of such a revival in a world that is rapidly slipping away from the ideals of Islam. But the hope is justified only so long as our leaders, and the masses with them, keep the true objective of Pakistan in view, and do not yield to the temptation to regard their movement as just another of the many “national” movements so fashionable in the present-day Muslim world—a danger which, I believe, is very imminent. I do not mean a nationalism based on racial lines, as we see it elsewhere (for such a tendency is impossible among Indian Muslims who, as a community, are composed of most diverse racial elements): but there is an acute danger of the Pakistan movement being deflected from its ideological course by laying too much stress on a “cultural” nationalism—on a community of interests arising not so much from

a common ideology as from the desire to preserve certain cultural traits, social habits and customs and, last but not least, to safeguard the economic development of a group of people who happen to be “Muslims” only by virtue of their birth. Nobody can doubt that the cultural traditions and the immediate economic requirements of the Muslim community are extremely important in our planning the Muslim future on Islamic lines. But this is just the point: they should never be viewed independently of our ideological goal—the building of our future on Islamic lines.

It appears, however, that the majority of our intelligentsia are about to commit just this mistake. When they talk of Pakistan, they often convey the impression that the “actual” interests of the Muslim world could be viewed independently of what is described as the “purely ideological” interests of Islam; in other words, that it is possible to be a good Pakistani without being *primarily* interested in Islam as the basic reality in one’s own and in the community’s life.

I hope that my readers will agree with me that such an arbitrary division between “Muslim” and “Islamic” interests is sheer nonsense. Islam is not just one among several characteristics of Muslim communal existence, but its only historical cause and justification: and to consider Muslim interests as something apart from Islam is like considering a living being as something apart from the fact of its life. But however nonsensical such an attitude may appear to a thinking person, there is no going round the fact that most people (not excluding most of our intelligentsia) are in the habit of never thinking at all. . . .

Evasion and Self-Deception

How many of our leaders, and of our intelligentsia in general, have an *Islamic* polity in view when they appeal to the Muslims to close their ranks and to sacrifice their all, if necessary, for the achievement of Pakistan? Is it not, rather, true that as a rule they are far more concerned with the movement’s negative aspect—the impossibility, for the Muslims, to attain to a “place in the sun” under non-Muslim domination—than with its positive aspect: our desire to build our socio-political existence in terms of Islam, and for the sake of Islam? Is it not true that to many educated Muslims, and to some of our leaders as well, Islam means no more than a tactical

weapon in their community's struggle with non-Muslims: not a goal for its own sake, but an argument: not a genuine hope, but a slogan? Is it, in short, not true that many of our protagonists are far more concerned with obtaining more political power and more economic amenities for a nominally Muslim community than with converting that nominally Muslim community into an *Islamic* community?

I do not wish to belittle what our leaders have done for us. In some respects their achievement is great and deserves the highest praise. They have succeeded in rousing the dormant strength of the community and in bringing about a sense of unity never before witnessed in the modern Muslim world. This much every sensible person will readily admit. But what I blame some of our leaders for is their apparent inability to rise to the spiritual greatness displayed by the Muslim masses in this decisive hour of their destiny, and deliberately to guide those masses towards the ideal which is fundamentally responsible for their present upheaval. To put it into simple words: our leaders do not seem to make a serious attempt to show that *Islam* is the paramount objective of their struggle. They do, no doubt, talk about Islam whenever they issue a statement or address a public gathering—but their references to it are always in the future tense, and hardly ever an attempt is made to bring the community's *present* mode of life and thought into greater agreement with the principles of Islam. This, I believe, is a very great omission. We should not forget that the future is, invariably, a child of the present: that is to say, the manner of our life today is bound to influence the quality of our tomorrow. If the meaning of our struggle for Pakistan is truly to be found in the words *lā ilāha ill' Allāh*, our present behaviour must be a testimony of our coming nearer and nearer to this ideal—that is, of becoming better Muslims not only in our words, but in our actions as well.

It should be our leaders' duty to tell their followers that they must become better Muslims *today* in order to be worthy of Pakistan *tomorrow*: instead of which they merely assure us that we shall become better Muslims "as soon as Pakistan is achieved".

This easy assurance will not do. It is self-deceptive in the extreme. If we do not sow the seeds of Islamic life now, when our enthusiasm is at its fighting pitch, there is no earthly reason to expect that we will suddenly be transformed into better Muslims when the struggle is over and our political autonomy secured.

I can almost hear some of our leaders say: "Brother, you are too

pessimistic—or perhaps a little bit too apprehensive. Almost every one of us desires a truly Islamic life. Only, it would be impolitic to insist on this ideal right now. In our ranks there are many people who render the most valuable services to our political cause, but—owing to a wrong upbringing—do not care too much for religion; and if we stress the religious side of our struggle from the very beginning, those valuable workers might cool down in their zeal, and so be lost to our cause. We do not want to lose them: we cannot afford to lose them: and so we are obliged to postpone our work for the people's religious uplift until after we have won a state of our own. At present we must concentrate all our energies on the short-term objective before us—the freeing of the Muslims from non-Muslim domination—and not dissipate them on purely religious considerations. If we insist, at this stage, too loudly on our long-term objective—the deepening of Islamic consciousness in the Muslims and the creation of a truly Islamic polity—we might not only estrange many of our Westernised brothers and sisters from our cause, but also increase the apprehensions of the non-Muslim minorities who live in the area of Pakistan."

Now I personally believe that the above reasoning is extremely fallacious and intellectually dishonest. Let us consider the two points mentioned therein one by one, beginning with the second.

As for the apprehensions which our insistence on an *Islamic* life might cause among the non-Muslim minorities, I should like you to ask yourselves: What is it that makes non-Muslims so bitterly antagonistic to the idea of Pakistan? Obviously, a fear of what they describe as a "communal *raj*" and the probability of the Muslim-dominated areas being cut off from the rest of India. The question as to whether the Muslims *truly* intend to live according to the principles of Islam or not leaves the non-Muslims cold. They are afraid of Muslim *political* preponderance in certain areas, and it does not make *prima facie* the least difference to them whether the Muslims are inspired in their endeavours by Islamic or any other considerations. Hence, they will oppose Muslim endeavours in any case, and with all the strength at their disposal.

With all this, the attitude of our opponents might—though I do not say that it definitely will—be to some extent influenced by the thought that what we Muslims really aim at is *justice for all*: provided that we succeed in convincing them that we are really moved by moral convictions and not by a wish to exploit non-Muslims for

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the benefit of Muslims. It is, therefore, our duty to prove to the whole world that we really mean to live up to the standard laid down in these words of the Holy Qur'an: "You are the best community that has been sent forth unto mankind: for you enjoy the Right and forbid the Wrong, and have faith in God" (*sūrah* 3:110). Our being a worthy *ummah* in the sight of God depends on our being prepared to struggle, always and under all circumstances, for the upholding of justice and the abolition of injustice: and this should preclude the possibility of a truly Islamic community being unjust to non-Muslims. I can well imagine that a non-Muslim feels apprehensive about his future in a state which, in his opinion, would aim at giving economic preference to the Muslim community at the expense of non-Muslims: but he will have less reason to feel such an apprehension if he becomes convinced that the Muslims are determined to ensure justice to Muslim and non-Muslim alike. And we cannot convince our opponents of our *bona fides* unless we prove, firstly, that an Islamic polity connotes justice for all, and, secondly, that we Muslims are really serious in our avowals that precisely such a polity is our goal—in other words, that we *truly* believe in the tenets of our religion. It is, therefore, quite erroneous to assume that the fears of non-Muslim minorities could be allayed by our discreetly avoiding, as much as possible, any direct references to our ultimate, religious objectives. This only creates in them a suspicion of hypocrisy on our part. The real way to allaying or at least alleviating their fears would be our clear exposition, in as great detail as possible, of the ethical ideals towards which we are striving: but even such an exposition will be of no avail unless we are able to show, in our day-to-day life, that those ideals mean more to us than mere slogans.

Apart from its probable effect on non-Muslims, an evasive postponement of our "long-term", Islamic objectives in favour of what some people regard (quite wrongly) as momentarily "expedient" or "politic", must have a detrimental effect on our community's moral tenor, and can only result in our greater estrangement from the ways of true Islam. Instead of becoming increasingly aware of the ideal goal before them, the Muslims will again become accustomed to think—as they did for many centuries—in terms of "expediency" and immediate conveniences, and the Islamic objective of Pakistan will most definitely recede into the realm of theoretical idealism—in exactly the same manner as the true objectives of

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Christianity have receded among the so-called Christian nations of the West.

We do not want that. We want, through Pakistan, to make Islam a *reality* in our lives. We want Pakistan in order that every one of us should be able to live a truly Islamic life in the widest sense of the word. And it is admittedly impossible for an individual to live in accordance with the scheme propounded by God's Apostle unless the whole society consciously conforms to it and makes the Law of Islam the law of the land.

But this kind of Pakistan will never materialise unless we postulate the Law of Islam not merely as an ideal for a vaguely defined future but as the basis, wherever possible, of all our social and personal behaviour at this very hour and minute. That there are in our midst many people to whom religion is unimportant to such an extent that they might "take offence" at our insisting on the religious side of our struggle should not carry the least weight in our considerations. The gentlemen and ladies of this kind will quickly enough subordinate themselves to the will of the community if they are made to realise that the community as a whole is determined to march towards Islam. In any case, their individual preferences must not be allowed to affect our determination. Can you imagine that the Holy Prophet would ever have consented to postpone, even for a single day, his insistent demand for a fulfilment of the "long-term" ideals of Islam in order to avoid "giving offence" to the idolatrous Quraysh, so that they might condescend to help him in building a Muslim state?

"Well," you might say, "the Prophet was a prophet, and so he could afford to be uncompromising. But we are ordinary people..." To which I would answer: "Do you believe in the injunction: 'Verily, in the Apostle of God you have the best example' (*sūrah* 33:21)? Don't you think that this injunction refers to your politics as much as to your prayers; to your public life as much as to your personal concerns?"

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It is a sign of our spiritual confusion—due to the long centuries of our decadence—that the one political movement which holds out the promise of an Islamic revival at the same time threatens to defeat its innermost purpose, and to degenerate into something

very much akin to the "national" movements of, say, Egypt, Turkey or Syria. There is a definite, though perhaps involuntary, tendency on the part of many of our leaders to ignore the spiritual, Islamic background of our struggle and to justify the Muslims' demand for freedom by stressing their unfortunate experiences with the Hindu majority, as well as to base the Muslims' claim to being a separate nation on the differences between their and the Hindus' social usages and cultural expressions. In short, there is a mounting inclination to consider the fact—for a fact it is—of a separate Muslim nationhood in the conventional, Western sense of the word "nation" instead of considering it in the Islamic sense of *ummah* or *millah*. Why should we hesitate to proclaim, loudly and without fear, that our being a nation has nothing to do with the conventional meaning of this word: that we are a nation not merely because our habits, customs and cultural expressions are different from those of the other groups inhabiting the country, but because *we mean to shape our life in accordance with a particular ideal of our own?*

It cannot be often enough repeated that our adherence to the teachings of Islam is the only justification of our communal existence. We are not a racial entity. We are—in spite of the great progress of Urdu as the language of Muslim India—not even a linguistic entity within the strict meaning of this term. We are not, and never can be, a nation in the sense in which the English or the Arabs or the Chinese are nations. But precisely the fact that we are not, and never can be, a nation in the exclusive, conventional sense of the word is the innermost source of our strength: for it makes us realise that we—we alone in the modern world—can, if we but want it, bring again to life that glorious vision which arose over the sands of Arabia nearly fourteen centuries ago: the vision of an *ummah* of free men and women bound together not by the accidental bonds of race and birth, but by their free, conscious allegiance to a common ideal.

Unfortunately, some of the most active of our leaders belong to that disillusioned, sceptical class of Muslims to whom Islam is nothing but a "cultural tradition", and to whom, consequently, Pakistan means no more than the first step on the road which the so-called "advanced" Muslim nations are treading: namely, the road to full-fledged nationalism. In spite of their frequent, verbose insistence on the Islamic aspect of our struggle, this kind of leaders think it more "modern" to avoid any allusion to the necessity, for

Muslims, of shaping their lives here and now in accordance with the religious principles of Islam—to the necessity, that is, of identifying their demand for Pakistan with a serious desire for a fulfilment of Islam's ideals in the personal and social concerns of their lives. It goes without saying that such a half-hearted attitude deprives the idea of Pakistan of its most dynamic—because spiritual—purport: and this is a far greater threat to its future than any opposition from outside could ever be.

For, the destiny of great nations and communities does not, in the last resort, depend on whether their neighbours *a priori* agree with their aims or oppose them: it depends, invariably and irrevocably, on the spiritual strength—or weakness—responsible for those aims. If our desire for Pakistan is an outcome of our creative strength and purity; if we attain to that clarity of vision which encompasses the goal of our endeavours long before it is achieved; if we learn to love that goal for its own sake—in the conviction that it is supremely good in an absolute sense (or, as I would prefer to phrase it, in God's sight), and not merely because it appears to be economically advantageous to ourselves and our community: then no power on earth could stop Pakistan from being born, and from becoming a gateway to an Islamic revival the world over. And if, on the other hand, our cry for self-determination is due to no more than a fear of being dominated by a non-Muslim majority; if our vision of the future is merely negative; if it does not encompass the hope of our being free *for* something, but contents itself with the beggarly hope of our being free *from* something; if Islam, instead of being a moral obligation and an end in itself, means no more to us than a habit and a cultural label: then—even then—we might achieve some sort of Pakistan by virtue of our numerical strength in this country; but it would be an achievement far short of the tremendous possibilities which God seems to be offering to us. It would be only one "national state" more in a world split up into numberless national states—perhaps no worse than some of the others, but certainly no better than most: while the subconscious dream of the Muslim masses, and the conscious dream of those who first spoke of Pakistan (long before even this name had been thought of) was the birth of a polity in which the Prophet's Message could fully come into its own as a practical proposition. . . .

The Time for a Decision

If our present leaders but listen to the people's heartbeat they are bound to realise that what the common man desires is not merely a state in which Muslims would have greater economic facilities than they have now, but a state in which God's Word would reign supreme. Not that the "common man" does not care for economic facilities. He cares, rightly, very much for them. But he feels, no less rightly, that an Islamic theocracy would not only give him all the economic justice and opportunity for material development which he now so sadly lacks, but would enhance his human dignity and spiritual security as well.

This feeling, this expectation of our common people is, as I have already mentioned, largely inchoate and confused. It is instinctive rather than intellectual. They cannot yet clearly visualise the shape which that theocracy should have, nor are they fully aware of the effort it will cost to achieve it. How could it be otherwise? For centuries they have been estranged from the genuine teachings of Islam; from time immemorial they have been steeped in ignorance, superstition, political humiliation: is it a wonder, then, that they rely only on catchwords and slogans and are unable to give, all at once, a coherent, valid expression to their innermost dreams and desires?—that they are unable to find, all at once, their bearings in the volcanic upheaval into which those dreams and desires have thrown them?—that, in a word, they need *spiritual* leadership no less than leadership in the field of political tactics?

To give a valid Islamic content, as well as a creative, positive direction to the people's dreams and desires; to prepare them not only politically (in the conventional context of this word) but also spiritually and ideologically for the great goal of Pakistan: this is the supreme task awaiting our leaders. They must not think that to organise the masses and to give voice to our political demands is all that the *millah* expects them to do. Organisation is, no doubt, urgently necessary; political agitation is necessary: but these necessities must be made to *serve* our ideological goal—and not, as we so often find it in these days, allowed to reduce it to secondary rank. To a Muslim who takes Islam seriously, every political endeavour must, in the last resort, derive its sanction from religion, just as religion can never remain aloof from politics: for the simple reason that Islam, being concerned not only with our spiritual develop-

ment but with the manner of our physical, social and economic existence as well, is a "political" creed in the deepest, morally most compelling sense of this term. In other words, the Islamic, religious aspect of our fight for Pakistan must be made predominant in all the appeals which Muslim leaders make to the Muslim masses. If this demand is neglected, our struggle cannot possibly fulfil its historic mission.

The need for ideological, Islamic leadership on the part of our leaders is the paramount need of the day. That some of them—though by far not all—are really aware of their great responsibility in this respect is evident, for example, from the splendid Convocation Address which Liaqat Ali Khan, the Qaid-e-Azam's principal lieutenant, delivered at Aligarh a few months ago. In that address he vividly stressed the fact that our movement derives its ultimate inspiration from the Holy Qur'an, and that, therefore, the Islamic State at which we are aiming should derive its authority from the *shari'ah* alone. Mohammad Ali Jinnah himself has spoken in a similar vein on many occasions. Such pronouncements, coming as they do from the highest levels of Muslim League leadership, go a long way to clarifying the League's aims. But a clarification of aims is not enough. If these ideal aims are to have a *practical* effect on our politics, the High Command of the League should insist on a more concrete elaboration, by a competent body of our intellectual leaders, of the principles on which Pakistan shall be built.*

This was perhaps not so very urgent a few years back, when our political goal was no more than a distant ideal. But, as it happens, the tremendous changes with which this country is now faced have made the achievement of Pakistan a very real probability for our immediate future: more than that—it is virtually certain that we shall have a Pakistan State in some form or other before June, 1948. But this is just the point we must bear in mind: there will be a Pakistan "in some form or other": and it is for us to decide *what* form it shall have. You must, therefore, admit that the question, "Do we really want Islam?" has been lifted from the realm of mere pious contemplation and has at last become a question of immediate, practical politics.

It is quite possible that before these lines appear in print the Qaid-e-Azam will have sent forth a call to the Muslim nation to es-

* These principles have been set out by me in the July 1947 number of *Arafat* in an essay entitled "Towards an Islamic Constitution".

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establish a Constituent Assembly for Pakistan; or, if this has not been done so far, it is bound to be done in the very near future. Hence, Muslim legislators and intellectuals must make up their minds here and now as to what sort of political structure, what sort of society, and what sort of national ideals they are going to postulate. The fundamental issue before them is simple enough: Shall our state be just another symbol of the world-wide flight from religion, just one more of the many "Muslim" states in which Islam has no influence whatever on the community's social and political behaviour—or shall it become the most exciting, the most glorious experiment in modern history: our first step on the road which the Greatest Man has pointed out to mankind? Shall Pakistan be only a means of "national" development of Muslims in certain areas of India—or shall it herald, all over the world, the majestic rebirth of Islam as a practical political proposition?

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If ever there was a time in which a community was called upon to make a conscious decision about its future, this time has come for us now. And it is for our leaders to exercise that decision.

Never before have Muslim leaders been endowed with such power to guide the destinies of the *millah* in the right direction—or in the wrong. It is within their power to decide, here and now, whether the Indian Muslims shall become *Muslims* in the true sense of the word and, thus, the core and backbone of a resurgent Islam—or just another "national group" among many other so-called Muslim groups and states where Islam is good enough to be displayed as a cultural label, but not good enough to provide the basis on which to build the community's social, economic and political existence. The present leaders of the Muslim League, I repeat it deliberately, have it within their power to make such a decision: for the wave of enthusiasm for Pakistan which has swept over the Muslim masses in this country, and which has united them as they have never been united in the past, has endowed those leaders with a prestige—and a power to lead—the like of which was never enjoyed by leaders in past centuries. Because of this, their moral responsibility is all the greater. They must not think that it begins and ends with political "manoeuvring" or "tactics": for, however necessary such purely tactical moves may be, they represent only a side-issue, a passing phase of the leaders' duties—their main duty

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being that of *nation-building*. And as the basis of our nationhood is Islam, all of our leaders should begin to think in terms of Islam right now, instead of deferring such a reorientation of thought to a future time ("we shall see to these matters after Pakistan has been achieved"); and they must not permit themselves to draw—as many of them seem to be inclined to do—a fanciful dividing-line between the demands of Islam and the "temporary" interests of the Muslim community: for, in truth, nothing could be more conducive to the best interests of the community—in political no less than in spiritual concerns—than its complete, conscious surrender to the demands of Islam.

In short, it is the foremost duty of our political leaders to impress upon the masses that the objective of Pakistan is the establishment of a truly Islamic polity; and that this objective can never be attained unless every fighter for Pakistan—man or woman, great or small—honestly tries to come closer to Islam at every hour and every minute of his or her life: that, in a word, only a good Muslim can be a good Pakistani.

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And this holds good for the leaders themselves as well. They must show in their social behaviour that they regard Islam as a serious proposition and not merely as a slogan; to put it plainly: that they themselves are trying to live up to the demands of Islam. I do not mean to say that all of them are remiss in this respect. There are among them many people to whom Islam is a living inspiration, and to these our homage is due. But, on the other hand, very many of our leaders have Islam only on their lips—and that only when they address a public meeting or make a statement to the press—while their personal behaviour and outlook is as devoid of Islam as the behaviour and outlook of the average political leader in Europe or America is devoid of Christianity. This must change if our struggle for Pakistan is not to degenerate into a pitiful copy of the "nationalist" endeavours from which the rest of the Muslim world is suffering. Though it may not be our business to sit in judgment over a person's beliefs—this being God's business alone—the *millah* does have the right to expect of its leaders that their way of life conforms to the ideology which they profess to defend.

But even if our leaders do attain to the most sublime heights of

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Islamic consciousness, their example alone will not suffice to safeguard our spiritual goal. Our community as a whole must be lifted up from the abyss of the moral and social decay in which it now finds itself. Our present moral stature is far below what is demanded of us by Islam. We lack civic spirit; we love the easy life; we do not mind telling lies whenever we think them advantageous to our supposed self-interest; we break our promises; we smile indulgently upon the most barefaced corruption, selfishness and trickery in our business affairs; most of us are mainly concerned with what is described as a "career", and with obtaining petty advantages for ourselves and our relatives; we are always ready to malign other Muslims behind their backs; in short, we do not seem to have derived the least benefit from the very fount of our existence: the teachings of Islam. And how can we hope to be worthy of a truly Islamic Pakistan, how can we hope to *achieve* such a Pakistan if we do not make the least attempt to rise from our moral depths? How can we hope to arrive at an equitable social order as long as the only source of all true equity—the love and fear of God—is absent from our hearts? There is, I am sure, no answer to these questions. Unless the Muslims radically improve their ways and moral standards and cease to flout the ordinances of the *shari'ah* at almost every step they make, the idea of Pakistan is bound to lose its spiritual purport and, thus, its unique position in the modern history of Islam.

As I have already said, the Muslim masses instinctively realise the Islamic purport of Pakistan, and genuinely desire a state of affairs in which *lā ilāha ill'Allāh* would become the starting-point of the community's development. But they are inarticulate and confused in their thoughts. They cannot find their way unaided. They *must* be led. And so, again, we come back to the question of leadership and of its duties.

It seems to me that the supreme test of the present-day Muslim leadership will be its ability—or inability—to lead the community not only in the purely political and economic but also in the moral sphere: the ability—or inability—to convince the Muslims that "God does not change the condition of a people unless they change their inner selves" (*sūrah* 13:11): which means no more and no less than that a community's political and economic status cannot be lastingly improved unless the community as a whole grows in moral stature.

CALLING ALL MUSLIMS

AUTHOR'S NOTE

THE FOLLOWING seven radio broadcasts were delivered by me from Lahore at the request of the Government of Pakistan in the late summer of 1947, i.e., immediately after the separation of Pakistan from India. The times were extraordinary and, as the whole world now knows, accompanied by countless killings of innocent people (amounting to a loss, on both sides, of about a million lives), as well as mass-migrations of Muslims from Hindu India—and *vice versa*—under the most appalling conditions imaginable. On their journey from East Punjab, Delhi and other parts of India, the sufferings of the Muslim refugees—comprising hundreds of thousands of men, women and children—were almost indescribable. They arrived by trains, buses, bullock carts and on foot, with only as much of their belongings as they could carry by hand; and many of them had been cruelly wounded and in every way maltreated on their flight to Pakistan. I myself have witnessed—and officially received—a whole trainload of Muslim women arriving at Kasur (West Punjab), all of them stripped of their clothing and absolutely naked.

First aid to these unhappy refugees was our foremost task. Food, clothing and medical supplies—the latter a scarce commodity in the Pakistan of those stormy days—had to be supplied by day or by night to many thousands of utterly helpless, frightfully suffering human beings.

In addition to the necessity of coping with a flood of destitute refugees, the Government of Pakistan, so suddenly called upon to assume power, did not as yet possess the necessary experience in administration. Moreover, shortly before the actual partition, the new "national" Government of India (headed by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru) had removed almost all Muslim army units from North

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to South India—Madras, Travancore, etc.—so that West Pakistan was left with no more than one battalion of the Baluch Regiment and one company of the 8th Punjab Regiment, wholly insufficient to secure our long frontiers with India in the face of steadily-growing Indian troop concentrations.

In result, chaos and apprehension grew steadily in Pakistan, especially in West Punjab. Lawlessness became the order of the day, accentuated still further by the selfishness and greed of some elements among our population, who had begun to regard the newly-born state of Pakistan as a legitimate area for economic self-aggrandisement and all manner of corrupt and corrupting activities. But over and above everything there was fear—something previously unknown among the Muslim population of what had now become West Pakistan: fear of an imminent invasion by numerically infinitely superior Indian forces.

It is against this background of chaos, despondency and growing corruption that these seven radio broadcasts, "Calling All Muslims", were delivered by me daily in English, and repeated in an Urdu translation on the very same evening. With God's help, many of our compatriots may have been morally aided by those broadcasts, which went straight from the heart of one individual Muslim to all of his brothers and sisters who were able and willing to hear them.

In any event, I hope that this small contribution of mine may offer a further documentation of a period so incisive for the birth of Pakistan and, through it, for the Muslim world as a whole.

I

MUSLIM MEN and women: You through whose sacrifices and sufferings the Muslim State of Pakistan has been achieved; you whose hearts are bewildered at the terrible calamity which has befallen our *millah* in these days; you whose hearts weep in sorrow, and you who are filled with anger; brothers and sisters in Islam—all of you who bear the proud name of Muslims: permit me to speak to you in this hour of your supreme trial.

To some of you my name and the nature of the work I am doing may be familiar; but many thousands of you who are now listening to me have probably never heard of my existence, not to speak of my work, and are perhaps asking themselves in wonderment: "What right has this man to address us, with the intention, it seems, of giving us advice?" To such of my brethren I should like to say this: I am not addressing you by virtue of any special "right" in this connection. I am speaking to you as one of the many millions who believe that the words *lā ilāha ill' Allāh* are the greatest truth ever revealed to mankind, and that everyone who believes in these words is duty-bound to contribute his or her best towards the welfare of all the others who share this belief and, through them, towards the welfare of all mankind. In other words, my voice is no more than the voice of a humble servant of Islam who feels that in this crisis of our existence no one has the right to keep aloof from social service. It is in response to this call of Islamic duty that I have taken it upon myself to speak to you on some of the tremendous moral and civic problems which will decide the future of the *millah* and of Pakistan.

For we must not deceive ourselves. Every one of us should realise that the future of the *millah* and of Pakistan hangs now in the balance. We have suffered a grievous political defeat in the first

hours of our existence as an independent state; we have suffered a tremendous loss of life and property; our economic structure has been thrown out of gear; we have to cope with a refugee problem on a scale never before witnessed by the world. All this, however, should not make us despondent. Other nations and communities have, in the initial stages of their existence, suffered similar defeats—and were nevertheless able to emerge victoriously from all such trials and dangers. It is, indeed, in trials and dangers that the real worth of a nation is tested: and history shows that the Muslims were always at their best when they were forced to fight with their backs to the wall. We, also, shall overcome the tremendous odds pitted against us if we rise in our spiritual stature and keep our faith and our courage intact. The one kind of defeat we must beware of under all circumstances, and at all costs, is *moral* defeat: the loss of faith in ourselves and in our historic mission. And this is the greatest danger, the real danger now confronting the *millah*.

Muslim men and women: You have demanded Pakistan on the ground of your being Muslims, and on this ground alone. You have demanded it because you rightly felt that your way of life and thinking was different from that of the other nations inhabiting this sub-continent, and that, in order to be able to live in accordance with the tenets to which you adhere, you must have a political homeland of your own. Your strength, your courage and your unity have achieved a fulfilment of this demand of yours. And now that you have achieved Pakistan and freedom is yours, what are you going to *do* with this freedom?

For let there be no mistake about it: freedom is not an end in itself—it is only a means to an end. The moment you achieve freedom *from* something, the question arises: What is this freedom *for*? It is this question which the Muslim *millah* is now being called upon to answer.

Obviously, the ultimate goal behind our demand for an independent Pakistan was the building of a free society in accordance with our own concepts of life and of social behaviour. We—the Muslims of Pakistan—had a definite vision before us: the vision of an equitable society ruled by the principles of Islam, in which all men and women of good will, whatever their creed or race, might find all the justice and well-being that is possible of attainment on earth. It is for this that the Muslims have suffered and struggled for years; and it is for this that they were prepared to undergo many more sufferings.

Some of us, probably very many of us, have still that vision

before their eyes; but there is no getting around the fact that very many of us have become blind to it. The *millah*, as a whole, has become weakened in its spiritual resolve. Countless people have become frightened by the terrible happenings of the recent past and present; the splendid enthusiasm which but yesterday distinguished the *millah* is now giving way to cynicism and despondency; the spirit of mutual cooperation is rapidly disintegrating; selfishness, greed and dishonesty have begun to replace our previous readiness for self-sacrifice. In short, social corruption of an unprecedented depth and magnitude is threatening to eat into the very heart of our community.

As I have said, it is this, and not the outward calamity which has been thrust upon our community, that constitutes the real danger to Pakistan. Clearly, God is now putting His *millah* to the greatest test in accordance with the words of the Holy Qur'an:

“And most certainly shall We try you by means of danger, and hunger, and loss of worldly goods, of lives and of [labour's] fruits. But give glad tidings unto those who are patient in adversity—who, when calamity befalls them, say, ‘Verily, unto God do we belong and, verily, unto Him we shall return.’”
(*sūrah* 2:155–156).

If we pass this test successfully; if we act in unison, with faith and courage; if we eliminate from our midst all corruption and dishonesty, no power on earth will be able to stop our forward march, and the establishment of Pakistan will become an eternal landmark in the history of Islam. But if, on the other hand, we continue to lose our faith and our social discipline; if we give way, as many of us are doing at present, to selfish desires and individual fears and permit ourselves to be tossed about aimlessly by the winds of fortune, from whatever direction they happen to blow: if this should come about, no power on earth could save us from ultimate disaster.

A great responsibility rests on this generation of Muslims. The manner in which they discharge this responsibility will decide whether we are truly a *millah*, a community of men and women inspired by the moral principles of the Message which the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) has laid before us, or just a chaotic mass of people, a rabble without faith, without aim and without a future. It is for you and for me, for all of us, to decide which of the two ways we shall choose: the way of faith, courage

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and discipline—the way which leads to the establishment of a truly Islamic society—or the road to despondency, chaos and unforgettable shame.

II

IN MY previous talk to you, two days ago, I mentioned that our struggle for Pakistan and our ultimate achievement of independence drew its force from the fundamental desire on the part of the Muslims to translate their own world-view and their own way of life into terms of political reality. All over the civilised world such a desire is regarded as something that carries its moral justification within itself: as something based on man's inherent right to arrange his life in accordance with his ethical concepts, provided, of course, that those concepts do not imply the causing of harm to other human beings. Now our claim for an independent Pakistan was and is based on precisely such a right. When we demanded a state in which the Muslim nation could freely develop its own traditions, we demanded no more than our just share of God's earth; we asked for no more than to be allowed to live in peace, to build a commonwealth in which the genius of Islam could freely unfold, conferring light and happiness not only on Muslims but also on all the people of other communities who might choose to share our living-space with us. On countless occasions our leaders—foremost among them the Qaid-e-Azam—made it clear to the world that the establishment of the Muslim State of Pakistan could not and did not mean oppression of non-Muslims, and that, on the contrary, every one of our citizens, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, could always count on the protection which a civilised state is bound to accord to its loyal citizens, and which, in particular, Islam has enjoined on us with unmistakable insistence.

Nevertheless, the non-Muslim world did not take kindly to our aims and endeavours. Though nobody in his senses would have dreamt of denying the right of freedom and self-determination to, say, the Irish, or the Poles, or the Chinese, that very right was ap-

parently deemed too good for us Muslims. I shall not go now into the reasons of this discrimination; but all of us know that in the crucial time of our existence there was no sympathy for us among the non-Muslim nations. Our desperate struggle for independence was branded by most of our critics as "reactionary", and therefore as undesirable. Foreign newspapers as well as non-Muslim newspapers in this country described our goal of Pakistan as a "political stunt", as a bargaining subterfuge aiming at no more than the achievement of more government posts and more economic advantages for the Muslim community in India. In short, hardly anybody except ourselves really believed that Pakistan was a reasonable and morally good proposition, or that we would be able to win it. That we did, in the end, win it was not due to any support from the outside world but to our own burning faith in the justice of our cause; and now that we have won Pakistan and embarked on the great adventure of building an Islamic State, all the forces of darkness and evil have been let loose on us in order to destroy what we have achieved.

For, as has already been pointed out by our leaders at the highest level, there is hardly any room for doubt that the tragic situation in which Pakistan now finds itself is not the result of an accidental outbreak of communal passions. The atrocities committed on our people across the border, the storm of destruction that has encompassed the Muslim population of East Punjab and of Delhi, are part and parcel of a cleverly devised and ruthlessly executed plan. It appears that our opponents have a twofold aim before themselves. For one thing, they wish to eliminate, once and for all, the Muslim element in those areas of the Punjab which have fallen to their lot at the time of partition; and, secondly, they intend to create such difficulties for the new state of Pakistan as would make it impossible for us to spend any of our energies on constructive endeavour. Quite obviously, we are not to be permitted to work in peace and order for the achievement of our dream. Our opponents wish to drown us in a welter of confusion; they wish to make any progress on our part impossible by destroying hundreds of thousands of Muslims beyond our borders, by uprooting those who survive, by flooding us with millions of destitute refugees and thus breaking up the economic foundations of our existence—in short, by making it utterly impossible for us to look beyond the immediate, day-to-day needs of a tragic present—and so to stop our march towards an Islamic State at its very start.

These are the facts—and none of you could have remained unaware of them. If I refer to all this now it is not to repeat once more what every one of you must know perfectly well, but to ask you, who now listen to me—and, through you, the whole *millah*—a very important, a very grave question: Are we, the sons and daughters of Islam, going to lose heart, simply because the odds against us are so great? Are we, the hope of future generations of Muslims, going to betray the trust which Almighty God has placed upon our shoulders? Are we going to play the game of our adversaries by increasing the confusion of our *millah*, by tearing our unity to shreds, by paralysing the work of our chosen leaders through destructive criticism, denial of mutual cooperation, lawlessness and petty personal greeds?

As it is, our external difficulties are almost without parallel in modern times; and the dangers which we have to face are certainly greater than anything we had thought possible. But should not this very fact inspire us with the feeling that God has selected us for a destiny which is without parallel in modern times, and that, perhaps, He means us to achieve something far greater than we had thought possible?

History teaches us that the way to greatness, to happiness and to victory is a hard and rocky way, and that the hand which hammers at the bolted doors of freedom is bound to bleed before those doors spring open. Indeed, in a nation's life no achievement really worth having can ever be obtained without suffering, and blood, and tears. It was because of this that Muhammad of Arabia (peace and blessings be upon him) and the little band of his faithful Companions were called upon to suffer cruel persecution at Mecca; it was because of this that they were banished from the country of their birth; but was not their suffering crowned in the end by the most glorious of achievements the world has ever seen? This we should always remember. For, though our endeavours and all that we may achieve can never bear any comparison with their endeavours and their achievements, it is, after all, their example that has inspired this *millah* of ours to strive, nearly fourteen centuries after the Hijrah, towards similar ends: the establishment of an Islamic State in which the words *lā ilāha ill' Allāh* would reign supreme. And it is perhaps only because of the greatness of our goal that we are now asked to bear a greater burden of blood and suffering than any other nation had to bear in our time, so that we might be strengthened and purified for the future that lies before us.

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Let us, therefore, draw new courage, new hope and—most of all—a new determination from all those terrible things that are now happening to us, and let us turn our eyes towards the distant horizon on which God's Qur'anic promise to His *millah* is written in letters of light and glory: "You are bound to rise high if you are faithful" (*sūrah* 3:139). *If you are faithful*: this, my Muslim brothers and sisters, is the key to your future.

III

ANYBODY WHO tries to analyse the prevailing mood of our people in these days is struck by the deep note of pessimism, not to say despondency, which finds its expression in a complete lack of social cooperation among the people themselves, and in their bitter, almost vicious criticism of the activities of their government. That our situation is difficult beyond words, nobody can deny; but, at the same time, nobody can deny that salvation can come only through a grim, purposeful coordination of all our efforts in the service of our common cause. Criticism of the government by the people is, in itself, a healthy expression of democracy—but, on the other hand, obstructive criticism is nothing but a denial of democracy; and it is in obstructive criticism that most of our people are now indulging. They seem to have forgotten in what extraordinary circumstances this first Muslim Government has come into being; they seem to have forgotten that the men who are now at the helm of our affairs have never had any breathing space since they assumed power, but have had from the very beginning to cope with difficulties of a magnitude seldom encountered throughout the history of nations. Even a far more experienced government than ours would have found a similar task almost beyond human strength; and there is no denying the fact that *our* government has never had an opportunity to gain administrative experience. How could it have been otherwise? For several generations the Muslim *millah* has been denied any effective say in its national affairs. The Government of the country was an alien government; the makers of its policy were always bent on keeping all real sources of power in their own hands, and jealously prevented our own people from any sharing in that power. A moment's cool reflection will tell you that the art of government can be learnt only through actual *exer-*

cising the functions of government over a sufficiently long span of time, and in no other way; and it can be learnt only through a series of trials and errors and subsequent improvements. There is no doubt that after the sudden birth of Pakistan our leaders have committed mistakes. They themselves will be the last to deny this. But is not the commission of mistakes an outcome of human frailty? Can any one of you, my brothers and my sisters, honestly claim that he or she would not have made any mistake if placed in a similar position of responsibility?

I am not holding any brief for our Government. I am not here to whitewash any errors of policy, or to defend any particular group of persons from public criticism. But I know one thing—and I hope that all of you know it as well: if ever there was a need for a people's cooperation with their government, this need is here and now before us. Criticism, as I have said, is a healthy sign of democratic life—but it is justified only so long as the critics themselves are prepared to live up to the standards which they demand of their leaders. And can you, the people of Pakistan, honestly declare before God and mankind that you yourselves are now displaying all those qualities of faith, of wisdom, of self-sacrifice which you demand of your leaders?

There is no use mincing words at this most critical juncture of our political life. The first and foremost call of the hour is for spiritual honesty and a frank admission of our failings. God knows that our failings are many, and most humiliating; God knows, and all of you know, that the first few weeks of danger and suffering to which the new-born State of Pakistan has been exposed have shown us in the worst possible light and have almost destroyed our pride in the achievement of independence. The Muslim *millah*, which but a short while ago offered a splendid picture of unity and determination, has overnight been changed into a chaotic, demoralised, disjointed mass of human beings. Under the first impact of the catastrophe which has befallen the Muslims in East Punjab, all our previous self-confidence seems to have gone to pieces. Many of us who had been clamouring at the top of our voices that no power on earth could stifle the *millah's* desire for independence, have suddenly been transformed into a mob of frightened sheep. Many of these who had yesterday professed to be ready to undergo any sacrifice for the sake of Islam and of Pakistan, have entirely forgotten their erstwhile boasts at the very moment when God began to

demand *real* sacrifices of them. Many of those who had shouted that they were prepared to lay down their lives for the achievement of their ideal have immediately given way to senseless panic on hearing of the butchery of their brothers and sisters beyond the borders of Pakistan. And many of those who had been asserting that their one and only object was selfless service to the *millah* seem now to regard Pakistan as a happy hunting-ground for all kinds of selfish endeavours, and have no thought for anything but the securing, by hook or by crook, of petty economic advantages, jobs, careers and government contracts for themselves and their relatives. Instead of the glory that was to be ours, the dawn of independence has witnessed our bitter shame. Instead of growing in spiritual stature under the weight of a unique and tragic experience, the *millah* appears to have sunk to almost unbelievable depths of confusion, cowardice and corruption.

Is this our true face?

If this were so, there would be no sense in talking about Pakistan and independence. There would be no sense in invoking the glorious heritage of Islam in support of our claim to being a nation: for all that Islam stands for has been utterly belied by our recent behaviour. There would be no sense even in hoping for a better future: for a betterment of a nation's outward condition can never come about by a miracle. God Himself says in the Holy Qur'an: "Verily, God does not change men's condition unless they change their inner selves" (*sūrah* 13:11).

This is a hard and immutable law, and there is no going away from it. If, therefore, our present debasement could be taken as revealing the true face of our *millah*, there would be no room for the expectation that things could ever take a turn for the better.

But this is just the point: we cannot believe that all these shameful happenings around us reveal the true face of the *millah*. We cannot believe that we, the sons and daughters of Islam, are really as worthless as we now appear to be. We cannot believe it—for, the very feeling of shame that now fills so many of us at the sight of our debasement proves that our vision of spiritual truths has not yet been extinguished: and as long as that vision is alive in a nation, the nation itself is alive.

It may well be that our present confusion is but the confusion of a new beginning, the deeper darkness that comes before the real dawn, the chaos out of which stars are born. But there can be no

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beginning for us, no real dawn and no starlight unless we realise how low we have fallen; and there can be no real freedom for us unless we rid ourselves of that slavish mentality which places all blame for our own shortcomings on the shoulders of our leaders. It is no more than just to expect of our chosen leaders that they will rise to the occasion and lead us wisely and selflessly in this hour of bitter trial: but it is also no more than just to expect of *ourselves* that we give those leaders all the help and cooperation which they need in order to overcome our present crisis. If we stand united in these days of upheaval and catastrophe, if we cooperate with one another with consciousness of purpose and honest determination, our long-cherished dream of an Islamic State will come true in spite of all the obstacles which our enemies may place in our way; but if we fritter away our strength in senseless squabbles among ourselves and persist in our present corruption, nobody will be more pleased than our opponents: for theirs will be the victory, and ours the disaster.

IV

A FRIEND who happened to listen to my talk last night reproached me afterwards for having been too hard on the Muslim community. Though he could not deny that what I had said about the failings of the Muslims was true, he was of the opinion that I should have merely exhorted them to be good, instead of depressing them by a reminder of how bad they are. In this, I believe, my friend was wrong; but as it is possible that his opinion is shared by many others of my listeners, it is as well that I should make my point clear at this stage.

I was telling you, my brothers and sisters, how bad you are because I am convinced in my heart that you could become immeasurably better—if you but wanted it. We are passing through a time of unprecedented stress and gravity, a time that calls for the utmost moral and physical effort on the part of every one of us. Unless we, as a community, are able to bring forth such an effort, our social and political life is bound to suffer grievously, and the very achievement of an Islamic State may prove to have been an illusion. Now, the moral and physical effort of which I am speaking depends on whether we are able to rise to great heights of spiritual earnestness and integrity: for it is thus alone that we shall be able to overcome the tremendous odds which have been piled up against us. It is precisely because of our lack of spiritual integrity that we have fallen so low in previous centuries; and unless we regain it quickly—not in the next generation, not a few years hence, but now, today—our future is dark indeed. At a time like this, nursery methods are out of place: and by “nursery methods” I mean that flattering, cajoling approach of most of our platform-speakers, who tell you sweet lies about yourselves, who assure you that you are the most superior of all people: who, in short, do no more than

confirm you in that false complacency which you have inherited from your decadent past. To do this is, in my opinion, nothing short of a crime. He who flatters you at this tragic hour of your existence is not your true friend: he is, unwittingly perhaps, helping you to persist on the road to destruction. A true friend can be, at this stage, only he who tells you the most bitter things about yourselves: for it is only in this way that the conscience of the Muslim *millah* can be awakened from its age-long sleep: it is only in this way that the dormant strength of Islam can be brought to the surface of the *millah's* life and force it to a new, glorious activity. Complacency, especially at a time like the present, can lead nowhere but to the nation's death. We need hard blows, hard words and hard truths to make us worthy sons and daughters of Islam, and to open the gates to that destiny which God Almighty holds in store for His faithful followers: a destiny full of glory and immortal achievement.

So much, I think, should be clear to everybody who has tried to understand our situation; but, unfortunately, only a very few of us do try to understand it. Most of us try instead to deceive ourselves by uttering slogans and commonplaces, and by apportioning the blame for our shortcomings to external circumstances alone. No doubt, most of the physical difficulties in which we now find ourselves *are* due to external circumstances: but are these circumstances also responsible for our failure to rise in spiritual stature and to meet our difficulties with that stoutness of heart, that single-minded determination which Islam expects of a Muslim? Are only external circumstances responsible for all the moral defects which for centuries have made us a plaything for non-Muslim nations? Is it only external circumstances that cause us to utter lies day-in and day-out, to deceive one another, to break our promises—to break, in short, every moral command of Islam? Oh no, my friends, to plead “external circumstances” for all our shortcomings is too cheap an excuse, and certainly unworthy of the sons and daughters of Islam. It is, moreover, not merely an excuse but a subtle method of self-flattery—that same self-flattery, false self-satisfaction and laziness of heart which has been our undoing throughout the past centuries. This frame of mind is most certainly unsuited for the terrible predicament in which the *millah* has now been placed. Self-flattery is always bad for any society: and it is particularly bad for *our* society, and particularly dangerous in *our* time. What we most urgently need is honest self-criticism and heart-searching, an

honest admission of our past mistakes and wrongdoings, and an honest determination to do better now and in the future. An effort in this direction quite obviously demands a great amount of hardness towards ourselves, a ruthless resolve to see ourselves as we really are, and not as our vanity would like us to appear.

Unless we succeed in this effort of self-criticism, we cannot possibly improve our ways; and unless we improve our ways, we shall probably not survive as a nation, and certainly not as a *free* nation.

As long as you try to persuade yourselves that the responsibility for all the misfortunes which have recently befallen you rests on the shoulders of your leaders alone, the *millah* will never be able to overcome these misfortunes. After all, your leaders—that is, the Government of Pakistan—are only human. They are not endowed with any supernatural powers. They can achieve only that which the *millah* wants them to achieve—or I should rather say, that which the *millah* as a whole is *able* to achieve. If the *millah* as a whole is imbued with the spiritual qualities of self-sacrifice, discipline and genuine faith in the ideals of Islam, those qualities will quickly find a practical expression in our political life. But if, on the other hand, we continue flattering ourselves with the thought that we are very nice people and that all the tragic happenings which we are witnessing every day are due only to inadequate leadership, then may God have mercy on us.

No, my friends, let us be frank about it: we Muslims are not very nice people—simply because most of us are not Muslims in the true sense of the word. It is quite possible for an Englishman, or a Chinese, or a Russian to remain unconcerned with the demands of religion and nevertheless to be a decent person: but not so for a Muslim. For us Muslims, religion was from the very beginning the one and only basis of our social and moral existence. We never had any other basis. We are neither a racial nor a national entity in the conventional meaning of this term; we have become a nation only on the strength of an ideology, a common belief in a particular way of life: and that ideology, that way of life is expressed in one single word: Islam. The moment we cease to be inspired by the message of Islam, the moment it becomes degraded to a mere convention, to a mere accident of birth, to a mere name, we lose all real justification to call ourselves a nation, or even a community. All our concepts of right and wrong, all our ideas of social cooperation had their source in Islam—and as soon as Islam became weak in us, we

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lost all sense of morality and direction.

This we should always remember—and especially now, when the future of the Muslim *millah* is going to be decided in one way or another. In order to survive and to attain to real freedom and greatness, we must revive in ourselves our lost moral sense, overcome the degrading heritage of our decay, become truthful, courageous, disciplined and helpful to one another: and all this can be achieved only on the basis of Islam. Unless we remember this, and act accordingly, the glory for which we were hoping will always elude our grasp.

V

YOU WILL agree with me when I say that our struggle for Pakistan was from its very beginning inspired by our faith in Islam. However much we have been lacking in true Islamic spirit, however much our personal lives and our social behaviour have conflicted with the demands which the Qur'an makes of its followers, there is no denying the fact that the Muslims of this sub-continent had a definite ideological goal before themselves when they started on their trek towards an Islamic State. We did not desire a "national" state in the usual sense of the word. To be sure, we used and still use the term "nation" whenever we speak of ourselves in English: but the use of this term is forced on us by the absence in the English language of an equivalent of the Islamic terms *millah* and *ummah*. What most of us meant when we spoke of a Muslim nation was, in reality, a Muslim *millah*—that is to say, an ideological community based on the world-view of Islam.

It was on this basis alone that our immortal spiritual leader, Muhammad Iqbal, for the first time formulated his famous demand for a separation of Muslim India from non-Muslim India; and it was precisely on this basis that the greatest political leader which the Muslim community has produced in modern times, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, took over the leadership of the *millah* a decade ago and guided it wisely, and successfully, towards the achievement of complete independence. Neither of these two men ever thought of Pakistan in terms of a state devised merely for the benefit of the Punjabis or Bengalis or Pathans or Sindhis; neither of the two had merely the sectional interests of a particular group or groups of Muslims in view: their vision went far beyond that. Whenever Iqbal spoke of God's Kingdom on Earth, and whenever the Qaid-e-Azam demanded a political structure in which the Muslim nation

could freely develop its own institutions and live in accordance with the genius of the *shari'ah*, both meant essentially the same thing. The goal before them was the achievement of a state in which the ideology common to all of us, the ideology of Islam, would come fully into its own: a polity in which the Message of the Prophet Muhammad would be the foundation of our social life and the inspiring goal of all our future endeavours. The poet-philosopher put greater stress on the spiritual aspect of our struggle, while the Qaid-e-Azam was mainly concerned with outlining its political aspect: but both were one in their intense desire to assure to the Muslims of India a future on Islamic lines.

Nothing could be nobler than this aim: and, in fact, it was this aim alone, fired by the *millah's* and its leaders' faith in the sublime truth of Islam, that has enabled us to win Pakistan in the teeth of the most stubborn resistance on the part of our neighbours and of our previous rulers. The Muslims were determined, after all the centuries of their decay, to have an Islamic State; and the establishment of a Muslim homeland was the first step in this direction.

It was the first step only—for a truly Islamic State cannot be produced by a conjurer's trick. A country that was for centuries ruled by an alien government in accordance with principles entirely alien to the spirit of Islam cannot overnight, as if by magic, be changed into a state similar to that of *al-khulafā' ar-rāshidūn*. We must not forget that it is the spirit of the people which is, ultimately and always, responsible for the spirit of a state; and as long as we, the people, are unable to rise to the demands of Islam, no leader in the world can ever succeed in making Pakistan an Islamic State in the full sense of this term.

For what, exactly, do we mean by an "Islamic" State? Do we mean by it no more than a country in which Muslims form the majority of the population, and in which all the main governmental functions are exercised by Muslims? This, no doubt, is one of the characteristics of an Islamic State—but only one of them: for if no more than this were necessary to make a state "Islamic", we could as well say that the Muslim Republics of Soviet Russia are "Islamic" States: which, you will agree, would be an absurd assertion. Or do we mean by an Islamic State a country where, in addition to their being a majority, the Muslims administer their personal affairs—like marriage, divorce, inheritance or religious institutions—on the basis of the Personal Law of Islam? This, no

doubt, is another of the characteristics of an Islamic State—but, again, it is only one of them: for, if this were the sum-total of the requirements of an Islamic State, countries like Albania or Zanzibar could be described as "Islamic" States: which, as we know, would be quite off the mark.

Neither the mere fact of having a Muslim majority in the country, nor the mere holding of governmental key positions by Muslims, nor even the functioning of the personal laws of the *shari'ah* can justify us in describing any Muslim state as an "Islamic" State. In all the countries which I have just mentioned by way of example, the above conditions do exist in some measure or other, but none the less neither Albania nor Zanzibar nor the Muslim Republics of Soviet Russia can really have a claim to being called Islamic States—for the simple reason that in none of these states does the Law of Islam supply the ideological basis of the people's life and of governmental policies. And the existence of such an ideological basis—and this alone—is the true criterion of an Islamic State.

The establishment of such a state does not presuppose, and cannot presuppose, an oppressive treatment of non-Muslim minorities: for Islam would not be a call from God Himself were it not based on perfect justice towards every one of God's creatures, whether Muslim or non-Muslim. In an Islamic State no non-Muslim should be afraid of being discriminated against or exploited for the benefit of the Muslim majority. Nor does Islam want us to exert any pressure on non-Muslims with a view to inducing them to embrace Islam. No—the only thing that Islam demands of every citizen, be he Muslim or non-Muslim, is a loyal submission to the Constitution, a loyal cooperation towards the common welfare on the basis of the social and economic laws which the Qur'an and the life-example of our Prophet have laid down for us.

When we were demanding Pakistan, we—at least the overwhelming majority of us—had precisely this ideal before our eyes. When we were saying that we Muslims must have a homeland of our own in which we could live and work in accordance with our own world-view and our own ethical concepts, we obviously dreamt of an Islamic State, and of nothing else. The very terms "Muslim world-view" and "Muslim ethical concepts" imply the acknowledgment of Islam as the guiding principle of our lives: for what is it that makes a Muslim different from all the other people

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around him? What is it that makes him assert a nationhood of his own? Or, to put it in yet simpler words: what is it that makes him a *Muslim*? The answer is obvious: a Muslim is a Muslim only by virtue of his adherence to Islam.

Friends, brothers and sisters: all of you who have dreamt of Pakistan and have now achieved it: remember that you are Muslims only by virtue of your adherence to Islam. Remember that you have a great heritage behind you and a great task before you; and that no great task can be achieved without a supreme effort of the spirit. Remember that you are the only Muslim community in modern times that has struggled for independence, and won it, not on the ground of any nationalist exclusiveness, but for the sake of Islam alone; not on the ground of your being Punjabis or Bengalis or Sindhis, but on the ground of your being Muslims. It is this, in the last resort, that has earned you the undying hatred of all those who do not wish the call of *lā ilāha ill'Allāh* to be supreme in any part of the world. It is this, and nothing else, that causes you now to bear sufferings far beyond anything that other nations have suffered in modern times.

And it is this, my friends, that should fill you now with a pride greater than you have been dreaming of in happier days: the pride of being the soldiers of God and the builders of the House of Islam.

VI

I HAVE now had the privilege of addressing you on several occasions on some of the moral problems connected with the extraordinary situation in which the manoeuvres of our adversaries have placed the new-born State of Pakistan. And now I wish to say a few words about the civic duties which have devolved on us Muslims with the attainment of our independence, but which, I am afraid, are being grossly neglected by most of us. I am not going to speak here of duties and activities which properly fall within the scope of government: for the men who today wield authority in our State are, I believe, aware of the needs and difficulties of the hour. My words are directed to the Muslim public: to all those numberless men and women who pursue the more humble avocations of life and have, as a rule, nothing to do with high-level political decisions. But the times through which we are passing are fraught with so great a danger for our future that none of us has the right to concern himself with his or her private affairs only. In fact, no avocation, no trade or business, no employment, however humble, can remain anyone's private concern under the impact of the tremendous tragedy which is now weighing so heavily on our community. In some way or other, every one of us has been deeply affected by the present turmoil; and so the reactions of every one of us have, in varying degrees, a definite bearing on our social and political fortunes. A good deal of the activities which in normal times would have been regarded as belonging to the sphere of private life have now come to play, cumulatively, a great role in the drama called "The Birth of Pakistan": for it is the behaviour of the many ordinary men and women, rather than any specific act of government, which will ultimately shape our future. If we behave well, Pakistan will survive its present ordeal and will become the centre of a new

hope for the whole Muslim world; and if we behave badly, Pakistan will soon become a by-word for futile endeavour, a bitter memory with which the non-Muslim world will taunt the followers of the Qur'an wherever they live.

We, the Muslims of Pakistan, are now undergoing a most severe test of our social character: and nothing should make us forget that a community's social character is no more than the sum-total of individual characters—the sum-total of all the qualities, good and bad, of the individual men and women who comprise the community. The manner in which we acquit ourselves of this test will decide whether we, as a community, are worthy of independence or not.

One of the most depressing aspects of the slavery to which the Muslim *millah* in this country has been subjected for so long a time was the ordinary man's and woman's dependence, in almost every walk of life, on directives issued by the Government. We hardly ever tackled any social problem—or, for that matter, any practical work of public importance—without first looking up to the Government for gracious initiative; and when that initiative was forthcoming, we blandly relied on the Government to chalk out for us what line of action to take. In those times we did not realise that a nation's welfare and progress cannot be made dependent on governmental action alone; nor, as a matter of fact, had our then-rulers the least intention to make us realise this. Our humility was very welcome to them. What they wanted was to rule over a docile mass of soulless slaves, always ready to obey the slightest behest from above, unable to make any decisions of their own, and not even possessing a will of their own. In order to achieve this end—so necessary from our rulers' point of view—they devised for us an educational system in which all independence of thought would be stifled from the very first stages of one's school life—for, according to Macaulay, such a system was the best means of obtaining suitable clerks for the offices of the East India Company and, besides, of training obedient subjects. A similar view governed almost all the branches of the civil service from the days of the East India Company down to very recent years. The alien Government did not want *civil servants*—that is, servants of the public: they wanted only servants of the Government, trained to obey the rulers' commands without any consideration of their own nation's welfare. It is not astonishing, therefore, that in the times of which I am speaking

the very word "public" assumed a somewhat contemptuous meaning. What the Government meant by it in this country was not quite the same as was meant by it in their own. There, the word "public" is synonymous with the sum-total of the inhabitants of the country—all those men and women in whose name, and for whose benefit, a government exercises its functions: but in this country the same word was for many decades meant to designate no more than a mute mass of *subjects*—people who had merely to follow the commands of the Government in whichever direction the latter pleased to lead them. It is obvious that such a system was not conducive to the development among us of any civic spirit: for civic spirit depends on the possession, by the people, of a great measure of responsibility—in other words, on their being citizens, and not subjects.

It is this legacy of our past that we have to contend with in our days. We have got rid of the alien government, and have placed in power men of our own—men who belong to us, men who have lived among us and whose interests are the same as ours. Nevertheless, this tremendous change does not yet seem to have penetrated into the consciousness of our community. Most of us still expect to be led like a herd of soulless slaves. Though we have won independence, most of us still believe that it is the Government alone that is responsible for the running of the state, and that the ordinary citizen cannot and should not do anything unless he is expressly ordered to do so.

Don't you think that this wrong attitude of mind is at the bottom of many of our present troubles? Don't you think that to wait in all matters of social importance for a lead from "above" is equivalent to admitting that the *millah* is not yet ripe for independence and democracy?

A democratic government is, by its very nature, no more than an agent of the people who have called it to power. It has certain administrative functions to fulfil, it has to outline certain policies and ways of action and to submit them to the people's approval. It cannot *force* the people to cooperation: but, on the other hand, it cannot function properly unless popular cooperation is forthcoming. To give such a cooperation to their chosen government is the people's first and foremost civic duty. That cooperation must be based on the people's resolve to eradicate all dishonesty, all corruption, all anti-social practices from the community's life—

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otherwise there can be no point in demanding from the government that it should function properly. After all, a government does not consist merely of a few ministers and secretaries: it is a vast machinery composed of thousands of persons, all of them belonging to the very community which they are supposed to administer. If the community as a whole is, like ours, filled to the brim with corruption and dishonesty, it has no right to expect efficiency of its administrative machinery: for no machinery can be efficient if its cogs and wheels are of faulty material.

No nation can prosper unless the men and women of whom it is composed apply to their own behaviour the same high standards of social morality as they demand of the officers of their government; for it is your fathers, your sons and your brothers—in a word, it is *yourselves*—who are responsible for the country's administration.

VII

LAST night I appealed to you not to expect in each and every case a lead from the Government, but to attempt ourselves, as free Muslims should do, a reform of our own affairs wherever possible. Many of you, listening to my advice, will probably have wondered what I was driving at. After all, one might argue, it is the main function of any government to give to the people a lead in all matters pertaining to communal life: for it is only through the instrumentality of a highly organised, authoritative body that concerted action can be produced.

Now this, my friends, is perfectly true in so far as the policies of the state, economic reconstruction, public safety and similar matters are concerned. There are, however, besides such matters—which must always be subject to government initiative—many other aspects and problems of our communal existence where the initiative must and can come only from the people themselves: and the foremost of these problems is the evolution of a civic spirit within the community.

By civic spirit we mean, firstly, the feeling among the people that they are an organic community, the members of which have all the main interests of life in common; and, secondly, the people's readiness to uphold those interests for the sake of the common good, and to defend them against any encroachment by selfish interests on the part of individual members of the community or of outside powers. Now the existence of such a civic spirit certainly does not depend on any governmental action. No government in the world can make the community under its authority public-spirited by mere administrative commands or even a rigorous police action: for, as in all matters of the spirit, a nation's civic spirit, also, is not amenable to the dictates of force. It is from the people themselves,

and from the people alone, that the moral impetus must come: that moral impetus which fills a nation with unquenchable thirst for cultural achievement, and enables it to achieve what it is thirsting for. In the last resort, the moral quality of a government—of any government—is conditioned by the moral quality of the people whom it governs: for it is the people themselves who produce the personnel of the great administrative machinery which we describe as “government”.

It is, therefore, not quite reasonable to expect of our Government that it should lead us in the direction of Islamic integrity and solidarity—while that integrity and solidarity are absent in our own behaviour.

I am not in the least suggesting that our *millah* is really depraved. On the contrary, the amount of suffering which our people have willingly undergone and are still undergoing for the sake of their ideals; the rivers of our people's blood which are flowing for no other reason than our belief in the truth of *lā ilāha ill'Allāh* and our burning desire to arrange our lives in accordance with this belief; our hopes for a better future, our readiness to bear any burden of pain and sorrow that may be necessary for the achievement of our goal: all this clearly shows that the heart of the *millah* is sound, and that the present confusion and chaos may in reality be only the birth-pangs of a new life. With all this, however, we must realise—and it is high time for us to realise—that all our sufferings will be in vain, that all our hopes will be frustrated, that all our belief in the great words *lā ilāha ill'Allāh* will remain an empty boast unless we produce now, among ourselves, and from among ourselves, that spiritual and social integrity which is the basis and innermost core of all civic spirit: that integrity without which no nation can remain alive, and without which the Muslim *millah* will never be able to brave the hurricane that is now sweeping over it.

As it is, only very few of us seem to feel that corruption is always a vice—and that at this time it is an unforgivable sin before God and the *ummah*. Only very few of us apply to themselves and their relatives the dictum that honesty in our day-to-day dealings is always necessary—and that at this time it is almost the sole condition of our survival.

Only a few, very few of us remember these words of the Prophet: “The signs of the hypocrite are threefold: When he speaks, he

utters lies; when he makes a promise, he breaks it; and when he is trusted, he betrays the trust.”

Can we honestly claim that we, who call ourselves Muslims, have remained free of these sins? It is not, rather, true that all our social life is blackened by them?

Most of us tell lies to each other daily and hourly. Most of us break their promises as easily as they make them. And most of us betray the *millah*'s trust at every step. Numberless are the so-called Muslims who offer and accept bribes as a matter of course; who invariably give preference to their personal friends and relatives whenever there is any opportunity for social advancement or personal gain; who do not mind robbing the State in a thousand ways—that same State for which so many of our brothers and sisters have laid down their lives; who do not mind, for instance, getting more ration cards for themselves than they are entitled to—while hundreds of thousands of Muslim men, women and children are starving; who do not mind buying or selling cloth in the black market—without bothering about the misery of those who are going naked for want of rationed cloth; who always try to get undue advantages from the fact that a cousin of theirs or a brother-in-law happens to be an officer of the Government; in short, who are prepared to sell their own honour and their *millah*'s happiness in order to satisfy their personal greeds, fears and ambitions.

This list of our degrading vices is long, but by no means exhaustive. One could go on and on for hours enumerating the failings which have so conspicuously blackened the face of the *millah*. But I do not think it necessary to produce a complete list here and now—simply because you, my brothers and sisters in Islam, know full well how deep we have sunk. I do not mean to say that *all* of us are guilty of the sins to which I have just alluded. But there is no doubt that many of us, perhaps most of us, are guilty of them. And so long as we are guilty of the sins which the Prophet has described as characteristics of a hypocrite, we have no right to regard ourselves as Muslims. A Muslim is he who carries the fear of God in his heart and tries, by following the ways of Islam, to rise in spiritual stature: and not merely he who happens to have been born in a Muslim house and bears a Muslim name. Unless, therefore, we make an honest attempt to eradicate such sins from our midst and to condemn those who commit them, we cannot in justice demand of any government to make Pakistan an Islamic

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State: for a state can be Islamic only if the lives of its people are Islamic.

It is for you and for me, for all of us humble followers of Islam, to make our lives truly Islamic: to value honour and integrity more than life itself; and not to permit those whom we love to soil the name of Islam by degrading dealings and ambitions. If we succeed in this—and there is nothing in the outward happenings that could prevent us from succeeding if we so desire—then God's promise to His *millah* will soon come true: "Succour comes from God, and victory is near." And it may be, if we succeed in this endeavour of ours, that all the blood, all the suffering, all the tears and all the pain which are now our portion in this world will become a source of unforgettable pride to us and to our children and to their children. They will remember us—they will remember those of us who will be alive at that time and those who will be dead—and will tell their own children:

"Do you see these buildings around you? They have been built out of the flesh of those who fought for Pakistan in the days of its greatest ordeal. Do you see these factories which provide the things for your daily use? The power to drive their machines, to make the wheels go round, has been provided by the sufferings of those who came before us. Do you see these fields which give you your daily bread? They have been irrigated by the blood of the martyrs who died so that you might live and that Islam be supreme on earth."

THE ENCOUNTER OF ISLAM AND THE WEST

AS SEEN BY THE MUSLIMS

(Radio Beromünster, Switzerland, 1959)

MOST EDUCATED Muslims have always been conscious of the intense historic relationship between the world of Islam and that of the Occident. For almost a millenium those contacts exerted a powerful influence on the Occident's political history and its cultural development—so much so that their *political* aspect, in particular, has to this day remained largely responsible for the angle of vision from which Westerners look at the Muslim world and its problems. On the other hand, in contrast to those millennial influences which Islam has radiated towards the Occident, we find that the opposite currents—that is to say, the Occident's influence on the political, social and cultural destinies of the Islamic world—began to take effect at a much later date: as a matter of fact, it hardly becomes evident to the historian before the last decades of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century.

However, this finding should not be misunderstood. It goes without saying that the innumerable, centuries-long warlike conflicts between the Muslim East and the West which at first led to a rapid expansion of Muslim rule over large areas of Europe, and then, gradually, to a forcible withdrawal of the Muslims from almost the whole of the European continent, were bound to play—and indeed have played—an important role in the shaping of Muslim political history. But however strange this might appear to the casual observer, all those developments were until recently limited to the realm of mere power politics, and did not directly touch upon the inner destinies of the world of Islam—so much so that even the views which most of the Muslims held about Christi-

anity and the Christian world as such remained unaffected by the social, political and cultural forms and ideas prevailing in the Occident. It was only about the middle of the nineteenth century that European thoughts and European institutions, backed by the Occident's rapid growth in industrial power and the resulting military strength began to exert a definite fascination on the Muslim way of thinking; and this, in turn, gradually led to far-reaching changes in the domain of Muslim culture and social life: a fluctuation whose final direction and shape cannot as yet be predicted with anything approaching certainty.

But with all this, it is obvious that for more than a thousand years the Occidental was unable to *give* anything positive to the world of Islam. For over a millennium the Muslims were the "givers" and the Occidentals mainly the "receivers" in the cultural sense of these words; as seen historically, it was only a very short while ago—namely, at the beginning of the modern industrial era—that the course of "giving" which once flowed from the Muslim world towards Europe reversed its direction fully, so that nowadays we find the Occident at its active and the Muslim world at its passive end. The question as to whether this reversed course may or may not be regarded by Muslims as a positive advance in a social and cultural sense allows, of course, for a variety of answers. Although the many impulses in the fields of sciences and technology which the West has in recent times transmitted to the Islamic world have undoubtedly resulted in the latter's material progress, one should not forget that, primarily, most of such impulses owed their origin to Western efforts at a political domination of Muslim countries; and since those efforts were in many cases successful, they conferred upon the Muslims not only certain—if limited—material advantages but also a host of cultural and spiritual disadvantages. The most important of these disadvantages is, obviously, the considerable weakening of cultural self-assurance which is nowadays so clearly evident in almost all of the Muslim world. And it is this lessened self-assurance which—following the Occidental prototype—has led to a weakening of the erstwhile *religious* convictions of many educated Muslims, as well as to the growth of particularistic, nationalistic tendencies at the expense of the grandiose concept of Islamic brotherhood.

But whatever may be one's judgment of this development—whether one welcomes the onward push of Occidental influences

into the world of Islam as a positive, desirable phenomenon, or whether one regards the gradual wearing-off of the Muslims' cultural identity as a loss not merely for themselves but, rather, for mankind's culture as a whole—: whatever may be one's answer to this most important question, the fact remains that in the consciousness of the Muslims this aspect of East–West relations has only within the last century and a half—that is, historically speaking, in our present time—assumed the character of a pressing reality demanding an immediate resolution.

In this context, a thinking Muslim is *a priori* struck by the—almost general—Western conviction that a "westernisation" of the Islamic world—that is, a renunciation of its hereditary cultural forms and as complete as possible an approximation of its concepts and ways of life to those of the West—is the *only* desirable or even possible direction of Muslim development. This Western conviction obviously rests on two basic presuppositions: firstly, that the Western modes of thought and institutions are in every way superior to the Islamic ones; and, secondly, that the tenets of Islam as such were time-bound and cannot, therefore, offer anything positive for the future: consequently, the sooner they lose their erstwhile hold over their society, the better it would be for the Muslims themselves as well as for the world at large. (This, by the way, explains the jubilant approval, throughout the Occident, of Kamal Ataturk's social "reform" of Turkey in accordance with Western patterns and his relegation of Islam to the utmost background of history.)

It goes without saying that no believing Muslim—that is to say, no person who consciously adheres to the Islamic world-view and regards it as the ultimate truth—can possibly accept the above-mentioned Western view as a valid proposition. But even so, we Muslims *are* faced with two pregnant questions: Is a better, deeper understanding between the world of Islam and the Occident basically desirable? And, secondly, how could such an understanding be brought about?

Obviously, there is only one sensible answer to the first of these questions: there can be no doubt that a better understanding between the two cultural entities is indeed most desirable in the interests of the whole world and the world's future. As soon as we realise—and many of our contemporaries have already realised it—that the bitter conflict of opposing tendencies nowadays pre-

vailing throughout the world is not a mere conflict of economic and social systems superficially labelled as "capitalist" and "communist" but, in its deepest reality, a struggle between basic concepts touching upon the goal and value of human life itself, we begin to comprehend that socio-economic measures will never, by themselves, enable us to save man's freedom and dignity from the forces of the stark, soulless materialism which threatens to overwhelm us all. Whether we are Muslims or Christians or Jews, we are bound to succumb in this struggle unless we are able to bring forth, from within each of our existing societies, the strength to conceive and maintain truly spiritual, religious patterns of thought and feeling which alone could withstand the onslaught of materialism. Should, then, in these circumstances, conscious Christians delude themselves into thinking that in this desperate struggle against the powers of materialism, they could with impunity forgo the great riches of religious faith which inspires the countless millions of people adhering to Islam?

It is obvious that instead of feeling joy over a hypothetical or real weakening of religious faith in the Muslim world, instead of jubilantly welcoming every sign of the educated Muslims' estrangement from Islam as "progress", conscious Christians ought to regard such an estrangement and such a weakening as a threat to their *own* religious and cultural identity: for, what is in balance today is not just this or that dogma of Christianity, not just this or that tenet of Islam, but man's spiritual freedom as such—his right to believe in the existence of God and to shape human life in conformity with this belief. Looked at from this point of view, the interests of the conscious Christian and the conscious Muslim are not merely parallel but, rather, *identical*; and a close collaboration between these two great modes of faith is not merely desirable but, rather, compulsory; and everything that is compulsory in the sense of being a logical, inner necessity must always be possible and attainable.

And so we arrive at the second, much more difficult part of our question: How could a better mutual understanding and as close as possible a collaboration between these two circles of faith and culture be brought about?

The main obstacle on the way towards this goal can be expressed in two words: mutual distrust. The overwhelming majority of Muslims distrust the Occident because during the last two centuries they have witnessed countless Western encroachments on the free-

dom of Muslim countries; and because—although the so-called "era of colonialism" is said to be a thing of the past—almost every Muslim country is still exposed to pressures of Western power politics, so that real liberation can be achieved only through painful efforts and occasionally only through heavy sacrifice of blood; furthermore, because in Western political thinking there is a basic difference between the freedom and self-determination of, say, the Hungarians or the Czechs and the self-determination of the Palestinians; and, lastly, because the mental attitude of most Occidentals is overshadowed by an almost hostile prejudice against the *Islamic faith* as such—a prejudice so deeply rooted that the Occidentals themselves are often unaware of it.

It is, of course, true that many elements of Muslim culture—in particular, its more or less romantic aspects—are widely and genuinely admired in the modern West. However, all the Western admiration of "The Arabian Nights" or of Umar Khayyam's poetry or of the architectural splendour of the Alhambra cannot, for the Muslims, act as a counter-weight against the endlessly-repeated slanders of their Prophet which are to be encountered in all Western literatures, nor can it gainsay the fact that so many Westerners contemptuously regard Islam as a sort of superstition, empty of all moral values, and as an obstacle to the progress of its very adherents. It is, therefore, not surprising that most thinking Muslims are still distrustful whenever they are told that the old Occidental attitudes *vis-à-vis* Islam have radically changed in recent times, and that the Occident aims at a new, *positive* relationship with the Islamic world: for, a Muslim can only visualise such a positive relationship on the basis of mutual *esteem* as well as of a factual recognition of mutual *rights*. And he cannot visualise it so long as every manifestation of a deepening religious consciousness among Christians is described—and rightly—as a "spiritual awakening", whereas every similar development within Muslim society is invariably labelled as "fanaticism".

All such points must be considered if we are to achieve a real advance towards an inner rapprochement between our two communities. And because the Occident is in our days politically, economically and technologically by far the stronger of the two cultural entities, it is for the Occident to take the first step towards the desired goal.

It should not, however, appear strange to us that many Occiden-

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tals find it difficult to overcome their distrust of the Muslim world and to take that necessary "first step". Their difficulty arises not merely from their historical memory of the centuries of wars between Muslims and Christians, which accustomed the latter to regard the world of Islam as an "hereditary enemy" and, moreover, to identify the Muslims' ancient threat to Europe with Islam itself. This erroneous identification is not surprising if one bears in mind that the birth of Islamic studies in medieval Europe was largely an outcome of Christian *missionary efforts*, and that until the end of the eighteenth century the only European Arabists were missionaries who regarded it as their sacred duty to refute polemically the "arch-heretical" teaching of the Arabian Prophet. The result of such efforts is the strangely distorted image of Islam and its history which we encounter, to this very day, in popular Western thought and literature.

A glaring instance of this distortion, among innumerable others, is the Western notion of *jihād*, the Muslim holy war. In the thinking of almost every Occidental this word conjures up the spectre of a fanatical war against anything that is not Islamic—and, particularly, a violent attempt at a conversion of non-Muslims to the faith of Islam. But quite irrespective of the fact that the fable of a forcible conversion to Islam by means of "fire and sword" has finally been abandoned by all respectable historians in Europe and America and been exposed by them as being a fallacious invention, the Muslims have a most weighty argument against this notion in their own Holy Book, the Qur'ān—namely, the fundamental axiom, "There shall be no coercion in matters of faith" (*sūrah* 2:256). On the strength of this categorical prohibition all Islamic jurists (*fuqahā'*), without a single exception, hold that forcible conversion is under all circumstances null and void, and that any attempt at coercing a non-believer to accept the faith of Islam is a grievous sin; and the Prophet himself stressed on more than one occasion that a Muslim who does commit this sin automatically ceases to be a Muslim.

As far as the concept of *jihād* itself is concerned, the Qur'ān defines it most clearly as a *defensive war*, and exclusively as such. The relevant Qur'ānic laws are explicit:

"Permission [to fight] is given to those against whom war is being wrongfully waged—and, verily, God has indeed the power to

succour them—: those who have been driven from their homelands against all right for no other reason than their saying, 'Our Sustainer is God!' For, if God had not enabled people to defend themselves against one another, all monasteries and churches and synagogues and mosques—in all of which God's name is abundantly extolled—would surely have been destroyed" (*sūrah* 22:39–40).

With these words the Qur'ān lays down the law of *self-defence*, which alone can morally justify a war; and the reference not only to mosques but also to "monasteries, churches and synagogues" makes it abundantly clear that the Muslims are obliged to defend not only their *own* political and religious freedom but also the freedom of the non-Muslims who peacefully live among them. Under no circumstances does Islam permit its adherents to start an *offensive* war. The Qur'ān says:

"Fight in God's cause against those who wage war against you, but do not commit aggression—for, verily, God does not love aggressors" (*sūrah* 2:190).

"And fight against them until there is no more oppression and all worship is devoted to God alone; but if they desist, then all hostility shall cease, save against those who wilfully do wrong" (*sūrah* 2:193).

The above quotations from the Qur'ān should suffice to convince our Occidental friends that Islam does not permit the waging of any war which is not a war of self-defence; and that the Occidental image of *jihād* as a means to a forcible spread of Islam is *utterly erroneous*. In this connection, I would like to mention that the term *jihād* as such is certainly not restricted to a war of arms but has a *spiritual* connotation as well. It is derived from the verb *jahada*, which means "to exert oneself"—namely, against anything that is evil. Thus, for instance, the Prophet Muḥammad described man's inner struggle against his own passions and weaknesses (*jihād an-nafs*) as "the noblest *jihād*"—a clear reference to the basic *moral* connotation of this term which is so flagrantly misunderstood in the West.

But with all this, there is no doubt that in the course of their long

history the Muslims have not always remained true to the authentic tenets of their faith, and that on more than one occasion they did start offensive wars in the name of Islam. But, then, have the Christians always remained true to the tenets of *their* faith? And can any reasonable person maintain that the teachings of Christ were defective simply because many of his later followers have ceased to behave in a truly Christian manner? We have only to bear in mind how great a role peace and love play in Jesus' message; and, in spite of this, the history of Christendom is at least as full of wars and violence as the history of the Muslim world. In fact, neither of these two communities has ever remained free from the abuse of its faith. One should only remember the Saxon wars of Charlemagne, in the course of which scores of thousands of pagan Saxons were slaughtered because they refused to accept Christianity; or the cruel religious wars at the time of the Reformation; or the gruesome tortures and burnings of "heretics" performed by the Catholic Inquisition during the Renaissance and well after it. None the less, we Muslims would not dream of holding Jesus Christ or his teachings responsible for the evil doings of people who call themselves "Christians"—just as we realise that neither Islam, as such, nor its Prophet can be held responsible for the un-Islamic behaviour of people who call themselves "Muslims".

And now let us consider the question of a cooperation between the Christian Occident and the world of Islam. In this respect we are thinking in terms of endeavours based on the *true* spirit of each of the two religions. For, however widely our theologies may differ, it is clear that the ethical and moral valuations of Islam and Christianity are on many points closely related. But in order to make it possible for us to achieve a full, mutual understanding and to build up, in togetherness, an effective ideological resistance to the soul-destroying forces of the materialistic world-view which, as I have already said, is so rapidly spreading over all corners of the world, we Muslims must demand a greater measure of fairness in the Christian attitude towards us: in other words, we demand and expect that the Christian Occident should cease to apply, as it has hitherto been doing, different standards to our and their own concerns. If liberty is something valuable, it must be recognised as a moral and political right not only of the peoples of the West but of the Muslim peoples as well. Whatever is regarded as right and just for Hungary or Czechoslovakia must be right and just for Algeria

as well;* and if the Italian struggle for unification—the *Risorgimento* of the nineteenth century—was good and laudable, the present-day Arab efforts at a unification of *their* countries must, too, be considered good and laudable. All in all, it is high time for the Occident to show its good will towards the Islamic world.

This may, of course, not be so easy as it sounds. After centuries of prejudices and false images, most Occidentals may find it extremely difficult to free themselves from their old, dearly-cherished misconceptions and to look upon Islam with the intellectual earnestness which, as the faith of at least 800 millions of human beings, it certainly deserves. On the other hand, the Muslims themselves must become fully conscious of the fact that until now they have done very little to make the teachings of Islam fully understandable to the West. A new, cogent presentation of Islam by Muslim thinkers and writers is indispensable for a mutual understanding between the two worlds of faith: for, the ideology of Islam contains many a point which is not *a priori* clear or intellectually appealing to a Christian. Thus, for instance, Islam is free from the concept of "original sin" and, therefore, also from the necessity of "salvation" as conceived in the teachings of Christianity—whereas in the latter these two concepts are the basis for all ethical consideration. Also, in contrast to Christianity, the tenets of Islam are not limited to problems of belief and morality but embrace the entire human condition in all its aspects—spiritual as well as physical, individual as well as social—so much so that all problems of man's spirit and body, of politics and economics, of morality and aesthetics are fully integrated within the world-view of Islam and the faith of a Muslim.

All this may sound strange to a Christian, because for him the concept of "faith" touches only upon the relations between man and God and upon man's moral attitudes; and, thus, Islam appears to him as too "worldly" and far in excess of what the Occidental usually understands by the term "religion". Hence, it is the moral duty of the Muslims to bring the intellectual premisses of Islam closer to the understanding of the Christians—just as it is the moral duty of the Christians to approach the problems of the Islamic world in the same spirit of justice and fair-play as they approach, and demand for, their own concerns. As soon as these require-

* It must be borne in mind that the above radio talk was delivered in 1959, that is, about three years before Algeria gained its independence.

The Encounter of Islam and the West

ments are fulfilled, both the Christians and the Muslims will fully realise that the ethical outlook which the two great religions hold in common is of greater importance than the differences apparent in their doctrines; and when this happens, both will come to understand what Jesus—whom we Muslims revere as God's Apostle and Prophet—meant by the saying attributed to him in the Gospels: "In my Father's house there are many mansions."

ISLAM AND THE SPIRIT OF OUR TIMES

(Radio Beromünster, Switzerland, 1960)

IT CAN hardly be denied that what may be described as "the spirit of our times" is more or less antagonistic to all truly religious thinking—with the result that in all religious communities and in all parts of the world men's faith is perceptibly losing its erstwhile power to shape human society and to give real meaning to ethical goals and valuations. This general retreat of religious faith and convictions cannot be simply "refuted" by a reference to the fact that in all countries of the so-called "free world" more and more churches and mosques are being built every year, and that the numbers of the participants in public religious services tend to increase rather than decrease. Such statistical arguments are not very convincing. They prove nothing more than that the people of our time are becoming increasingly conscious of their moral and social perplexity and are longing for new spiritual directives. This phenomenon cannot by any means be regarded as a sign that the traditional religions as such are growing in strength, for the simple reason that only a tiny majority of those regular visitors to churches and mosques are really willing to allow their religious convictions to exert a decisive influence over their personal and public actions, or on their views as to how human society should be arranged, or what ethical goals man ought to pursue in his practical endeavours. Anyone who approaches the questions of the present-day role of religion with a modicum of intellectual honesty must admit that less and less people nowadays are prepared to concede to traditional religious teachings their one-time right to give direction and shape to social life as well as to guide man's individual thought; and many of us are beginning to suspect that this phenomenon is ultimately responsible for the moral, political and even the economic confusion of our times.

Before proceeding further on the basis of this insight, I would like to discuss the question as to what the religion of *Islam* has to offer to the people of our time—to those people who endeavour to find a new spiritual orientation within the chaos that threatens to devour so many of the ethical ideas to which we have been accustomed in the past. It must, of course, be stressed that I am considering this problem from the point of view of a *Muslim*: that is to say, on the basis of the conviction that the teachings of Islam—which diverge in so many respects from the beliefs held by most Westerners—represent a valid truth and offer the best formulation of this truth. At the same time, however, I am fully aware that the Islamic way to the truth may appear unacceptable to people of other faiths; and so I shall confine myself solely to a statement of the spiritual expectations which we Muslims—or at least the thinking ones among us—connect with our faith. None the less, it seems to me that such a statement should be welcome not merely to a thinking Muslim, but also to a thinking Christian: for, after all, the religious teachings of both go back to one and the same spiritual “ancestry”—the Abrahamic tradition—and, therefore, it is more than probable that by better understanding the premisses of the other’s faith, each of us can achieve a better understanding and a deeper appreciation of his own faith.

Speaking, therefore, from the Islamic point of view, and on the basis of the historical experiences of the Muslim world, I would like to start with the assertion that the decay of religious feeling in our time has no inner connection whatever with the progress of modern *science*, as so many of our contemporaries seem to believe. Whatever the more naive among them may imagine, and whatever be the world-view of this or that scientist, it is an undisputable fact that the natural sciences have not been able to disprove the existence of a conscious, creative Will behind and above the observable or calculable phenomena of the universe. On the contrary, not a few of the most outstanding physicists of our days have admitted that the weight of their own scientific findings forces them to conclude that, as the British astronomer James Jeans has so succinctly expressed it, “the existence of God is a mathematical necessity”.

But if the decay of religious convictions, so glaringly obvious nowadays, has nothing to do with the natural sciences, what, then, is its cause?

It seems to me that the “cause” for which we are looking is

purely negative: namely, a failure on the part of the religious leaders of all communities and persuasions to show man how to arrange his practical life in a manner which might be conducive to his society’s material welfare and at the same time remain in full accord with the moral and spiritual postulates of his faith. This failure of the religious leaders has resulted in a gradual divorce of so many traditional religious tenets from the acute problems and controversial issues of the present and, thus, their banishment into a realm lacking all reality. Most probably, something of this kind has happened in all the great religious communities, in the East as well as in the West. It is, of course, possible that this failure of effective religious leadership in the field of worldly human endeavours has not yet become equally evident everywhere—especially not within communities in which religion is almost exclusively concerned with man’s soul and spirit and only cursorily touches upon his mundane affairs; but this same failure has become very clearly and very threateningly evident in the world of Islam. In order to understand why this is so, one must accord a special consideration to certain fundamental ideas underlying the teachings of Islam.

Starting with the premiss that all life is God-willed and, therefore, positive, Islam implicitly refuses to draw a dividing-line between man’s “soul” and his “body” in the sense of there being an inherent conflict between his physical, emotional and spiritual requirements. In other words, Islam teaches us that we need not despise our sensual urges in order to achieve spiritual fulfilment. By virtue of man’s nature, body and soul are to be regarded as mutually complementary, equally valid elements of the entity described as “the human personality”, and the fact of their coexistence and inseparability is conceived as the natural basis of human life as such. In this way, Islam enables man to participate in all manner of worldly activities as well as to go through the whole range of his own bodily needs and urges—and at the same time to remain conscious of the moral imperatives to which all that worldly life and all those urges and emotions must be subordinated. Thus the innermost purpose of the Islamic message consists in guiding the *whole* human being to a form of existence in which both his spiritual desires and his legitimate physical and social urges could find a maximum of fulfilment without offending against the rights or feelings of other human beings. Man’s desire to live as fully as possible in his body as well as in his spirit is not only recognised as

positive instinct but is even endowed with the quality of an ethical postulate: that is to say, man is not merely *allowed* to make the fullest possible use of his God-given life on earth, but is *duty-bound* to strive for it. Consequently, the Qur'ān explicitly rejects every form of self-mortification and exaggerated asceticism: and the Prophet Muḥammad summed up, as it were, this Qur'ānic teaching in his famous saying, "There is no world-denial (*rahbaniyyah*, lit., "monkishness") in Islam." Without doubt, both the Qur'ān and the authentic sayings of the Prophet are full of admonitions not to ascribe undue importance to our earthly life and always to remain conscious that this life is no more than the *first stage* of human existence: but precisely because it is the first—and therefore the formative—stage, man is enjoined to utilise all its positive, legitimate possibilities to the full, and thus to become really worthy of the bliss which awaits the righteous in the life to come. Hence, a Muslim is aware that he does not offend against true faith if he—or she—finds pleasure, with moderation and dignity, in the beautiful things of the world of matter: for, in the words of the Prophet Muḥammad, "God loves to see on his worshippers signs of His grace." And because God has created the human being as man and woman, sexual life is not regarded as a "necessary evil" but rather as a divine gift, to be partaken of and cherished within its legitimate limits, that is to say, within marriage: and so, for every adult Muslim man and woman marriage is raised to the status of a definite religious recommendation.

On the basis of these findings we can easily understand why it is that in the Islamic world-view not the ascetic saint as such is regarded as the ideal type of human being, but, rather, a person in whom all his inborn intellectual and spiritual qualities—side by side with worldly energies and abilities—achieve their fullest expression not only in saintly thoughts and feelings but also in social, outward deeds: in short, all that we nowadays visualise in the concept of a "well-rounded personality". All authentic Traditions show us that the Prophet Muḥammad was such a personality. An intense God-consciousness underlied all that he said and did—and none the less, he participated fully in the worldly events within, or touching upon, his environment. He spent many days in supererogatory fasting and whole nights in solitary prayer—and none the less he was endowed with a gentle sense of humour which invariably caused his followers' hearts to open up to him. He was a

sublime thinker, always able to convey deep mystical ideas to those who had the ability to grasp them—and at the same time he was able to enjoy, as husband and father, the simple, intimate pleasures of family life. He was a practical statesman, an incomparable, incontestable leader of his community in peace and in war—and none the less he lived humbly and in self-imposed poverty, always conscious of the fact that the real, literal meaning of *Islam* is man's self-surrender to God.

And thus it becomes obvious that in an ideology like the Islamic one there can be no dividing-line between the "spiritual" and the "worldly" spheres—and therefore also no dividing-line between man's faith and his practical life. In the teachings of Islam, these two aspects of human life are fully interwoven—so fully that a neglect of one of them must unavoidably lead to a decay of the other. And it is this, indeed, that has happened in the last few centuries of Muslim history. Because most of our religious leaders have failed to attend to their principal task, namely, to guide the community in the *practical* affairs of life as well, and instead have confined themselves to considerations of mere ritual and eschatology, the Muslims have gradually lost their erstwhile ideological impetus and, thus, all cultural and social creativity. However strange it may sound to non-Muslim ears, the cause of the intellectual and also, therefore, spiritual decadence of the entire Muslim world is not to be found in a supposedly overwhelming "worldliness" of the Muslim peoples but, on the contrary, in the *insufficient* worldliness—or, rather, in the absence of all worldliness—on the part of their religious leadership: a failure which resulted in the gradual alienation of the Muslim faith from the Muslim reality.

In order to grasp this negative development fully, one must bear in mind that—as I have already stressed—Islam differs from all other religions in a most essential point. According to its teachings, the reality of human life cannot be divided into separate "material" and "spiritual" realms; it follows, therefore, that Islam, in contrast to other religions, demands of man a dedication to it of his *entire existence*: in other words, Islam is not confined to problems of individual faith and individual morality but affects all aspects of social life as well. Hence, the Prophet declared that "action is an integral element of faith": which leads us to the finding that unless faith is reflected in righteous actions—and, in particular, social actions—it cannot possibly have any real value. And it is precisely this all-

embracing, ideological peculiarity of Islam which makes it clear why the Muslim world was bound to decline as soon as its religious leaders ceased to think creatively about those fundamentals of Islamic ideology and, thus, to lead the community effectively in the practical, social aspects of life. On the other hand, as soon as we begin to understand this historical cause—the most important cause—of the obvious, centuries-old Muslim decline, we begin to realise that a spiritual, cultural and socio-political revival of the Muslim world is most intimately connected with and depends upon the possibility of the Muslims' gaining a new, direct insight—that is to say, a *creative* insight—into the pristine teachings of Islam. And, as it happens, every day more and more Muslims are becoming conscious of the fact that the gaining of such an insight is nowadays their principle, unavoidable task.

In addition to this, more and more Muslims of our time realise that the innermost goal of the Islamic Faith consists in enabling man to live in spiritual and social security as well as in intellectual and physical dignity; and they realise, too, that this goal can only be reached through social cooperation. It is obvious that such a cooperation presupposes the existence of a generally accepted legal system: and this, precisely, explains why the concept of Canonical Law—called *sharī'ah*—plays so great a role within the ideology of Islam. The Qur'ān and the historically authenticated teachings of its Prophet provide a concrete body of laws concerned with the behaviour of the individual as well as with the mutual relations of the individuals within the society. This body of laws touches upon human life in all its aspects. It relates to problems of a man's or a woman's personal actions as well as to the structure of the society as such; to principles of education and to sexual behaviour; to economics as well as to civic rights and duties; to civil law and to criminal law. And it is noteworthy that all these multiform problems are dealt with by the *sharī'ah* of Islam from the viewpoint of the natural law of *time-bound development* to which all human concerns are subject: a premiss which finds its practical expression in the principle of *ijtihād*—the right to individual judgment in the application of a legal injunction—and thus in the great elasticity which distinguishes Islamic Law and makes it applicable to all stages of man's social development.

As already mentioned, it is the so-called "worldliness" of Islam—that is, its emphasis on the positive value of man's life on

earth—which differentiates it most strikingly from all the other great religions. However, one should not overlook the fact that despite all its stress on the importance of mankind's material and social well-being, Islam postulates that all the endeavours relating thereto must be subject to a spiritual orientation *sub specie aeternitatis*. Obviously, such an attitude not only justifies the social and scientific dynamism so characteristic of our age, but also fully corresponds to the hopes of the present-day Muslims themselves. After centuries of utter stagnation and sterility, they are beginning, once again, to understand that Islam has much more to offer than mere spiritual consolation; and many of them have already become aware of the possibility that a practical application of Islam to social problems might enable their community—and perhaps the rest of mankind with them—to find a way out of the confusion in which we all find ourselves today. In the eyes of such thinking Muslims, only a living, dynamic conception of the teachings of Islam offers a real alternative to the crude materialism which nowadays threatens to inundate the whole world.

I believe that the possibility of such an intellectual and spiritual re-birth of the Muslim community could have a great, positive significance not only for the world of Islam but also for the Christian world. The mutual relations and interchanges between individual peoples and groups, whether positive or otherwise, are significantly growing day by day; and this is true of religious influences as well. One could indeed maintain that a strengthening or weakening of spiritual convictions within one great religious community exerts invariably, in a thousand imperceptible ways, a corresponding influence on all other—and particularly the more closely-related—religious communities. This influence is not just confined to the area of theology but, rather, touches upon the problem of the continued existence or non-existence of all ethical valuation as such.

THE ANSWERS OF ISLAM

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

THE FOLLOWING answers to a series of pertinent questions are the result of a questionnaire posed by the well-known German publisher Gerhard Szczesny, in collaboration with the Bavarian Broadcasting Corporation (Bayerischer Rundfunk), to several selected representatives of the great world religions. My own contribution, comprising answers from the *Islamic* point of view, was subsequently re-broadcast in several Muslim and non-Muslim countries and finally published in book form, together with the answers of the other participants, under the title *Die Antwort der Religionen*, which is still in print. I am grateful to Mr. Szczesny for permission to reproduce here my own answers, which I have translated into English.

I. MAN AND THE UNIVERSE

1

(Q) *How would you describe the relationship between our world and our reality on the one side, and that other, supernatural reality to which all religions refer? Is that which we can perceive and describe but a limited, sensually approachable aspect of one all-embracing reality, or is it that "our" and that "other" world are two entirely different categories of existence?*

(A) Within the Islamic conception of reality the question of its division into "natural" and "supernatural" categories does not arise. Everything that is and happens or, conceivably, could be or happen is a result of God's creative activity—and is, therefore, not only "natural" in the innermost sense of this term, but also belongs to one and the same, conceptually integrated reality. Certain aspects of this multi-faceted, complex reality are directly open to human insight and comprehension and are, therefore, referred to in the Qur'ān as the "observable sphere of Being" (*alam ash-shahādah*), while certain other of its aspects remain temporarily or even permanently beyond the reach of human perception and belong, accordingly, to the "non-observable sphere" (*alam al-ghayb*). Some aspects of that latter sphere or category will reveal themselves to man's perception and understanding at the next stage of his existence—that is, in his life after death—whereas other aspects are destined to remain forever within the exclusive knowledge of God. With all this, however, both these spheres of Being—those which are *a priori* perceptible by man as well as those which are temporarily or permanently non-perceptible—are but parts of one and the same reality which flows from God: for, as the Qur'ān states, He is "the Self-Subsistent Fount of all Being" (*al-qayyūm*). Hence, a Muslim is never tempted to visualise the con-

cept of "reality" in a dualistic sense. Moreover, since the entire teaching of the Qur'ān aims at an unceasing deepening of man's consciousness and a constant widening of his spiritual experiences, the boundary lines between that which is *a priori* observable and that which lies beyond man's perception are by no means rigid or final even in this present life; and it is for this reason that we Muslims do not admit of any qualitative or even conceptual separation of "our" reality from that sphere of existence which is not open to our senses or is beyond the potential limits of our understanding: for us, *all* reality is one and indivisible.

2

(Q) *Does the "other reality" become in any way apparent within "our" reality? What possibilities are open to man to learn anything about it: that is to say, whether it exists at all and what might be its characteristics? What role may be ascribed in this context to revelations, sacred books, and to religious traditions in general? Are there miracles—that is, happenings in which the "other reality" reveals itself through a suspension of the laws and conditions prevalent in "our" reality?*

(A) As I have already explained in my answer to the preceding question, Islam does not conceive of "reality" in a dualistic sense but, rather, discerns in all of it an intrinsic unity: namely, a many-layered and multi-faceted revelation of God's creative Will. Hence, for us Muslims there is no question of "another" reality as an antithesis to "ours": we differentiate only between the perceptible and the non-perceptible aspects of one and the same totality. On the other hand, it may sometimes happen that one or another of those aspects of reality which are normally beyond human perception reveals itself to a person's searching intellect and perhaps even to his or her senses, either through a personal, intuitive cognition or, in a more general and usually more enduring manner, as a result of systematic research, be it individual or collective: for, a good deal of what is normally unknown to us need not always remain unknowable. This applies, in particular, to our cognition of God's unceasing creativeness in both the concrete and the abstract aspects of the universe. This creative activity is described in the Qur'ān as "God's way" (*sunnat Allāhi*); and it encompasses all that is conceived of as "the laws of nature". It follows, therefore,

that many of those facets of reality which, at first sight, are unknown to us may become accessible to human understanding by way of a systematic observation of various natural phenomena and a study of their mutual relations: in other words, by means of scientific research. And because, as I have already mentioned, Islam aims at a continuous widening and deepening of man's consciousness, the Qur'an stresses again and again the importance of our *study of nature* as one of the foremost ways towards a deeper understanding of God's creative activity through which He reveals to us His Being. Both the Qur'an and the authentic teachings of the Apostle of God are full of admonitions in this respect: and herein lies an explanation of the Muslims' tremendous achievements, during the early centuries of Islam, in the domain of natural sciences and the development of a truly scientific methodology.

It must, however, be borne in mind that scientific research alone cannot possibly unveil to us *all* aspects of reality: for, the endless diversity and mutual intertwining of the factors responsible for that reality places many of its aspects far beyond the limits of empirical research and scientific definition. Within this category—the category of what is beyond the reach of science as such, and therefore undiscoverable through its methods—lies the domain of *ethics*, which plays so dominant a role in human life and is, consequently, inseparable from what we describe as “reality”. Hence, in order to provide for us the necessary guidance in the field of ethical valuations—a guidance which science cannot vouchsafe to us—God unveils to us the meaning of Good and Evil through what is termed “revelation”: that is, the direct insight into ethical truths and their inter-relations granted by God to certain exceptional and exceptionally-receptive personalities described as “prophets”. As the Qur'an repeatedly stresses, no human group or community (in the wider sense of these terms) has ever been left without such a prophetic guidance; and this principle of historical continuity in the divine act of revelation represents one of the fundamental Qur'anic statements.

As regards the question of *miracles*, one must always remember that the Qur'anic expression *ayah* signifies not only a “miracle” in the sense of a happening which goes beyond or is *a priori* outside the usual (or usually observable) course of natural phenomena, but is also synonymous with “sign” and “message” in the abstract senses of these terms; and the last-named of these meanings is the

one which is by far the most frequently met with in the Qur'an. Thus, what is commonly described as a “miracle” constitutes, in fact, an *unusual divine message* expressing—often in a symbolic manner—a spiritual truth which would otherwise have remained hidden from man's intellect. But even such extraordinary, miraculous messages cannot be regarded as “supernatural” for the simple reason that the so-called “laws of nature” are only a perceptible manifestation of “God's way” (*sunnat Allāhi*) in respect of His creation—and, consequently (as already mentioned), everything that exists or happens, or could conceivably exist or happen, is “natural” in the innermost sense of this word, irrespective of whether it conforms to the ordinary (or “usual”) course of events or goes beyond it. And since, as a rule, such unusual messages reach us through one or another of those specially gifted, God-chosen personalities spoken of in His revelation as His messengers or prophets, the popular mind attributes to the latter the ability to “perform miracles”—a misconception which the Qur'an removes by the words: “Miracles (*al-āyāt*) are in the power of God alone” [lit., “are only with God”] (*sūrah* 6:109).

3

(Q) *Does scientific research play any significant role in man's cognition of the “other reality”? Must the statements of a religion be in accord with scientific findings, or is such an accord irrelevant? Does religion come to its own only at the point where all scientific explanation of cosmic truths reaches the end of its potentialities?*

(A) As for the role of science as such, it must be stressed that all scientific research—that is to say, a systematic observation of natural phenomena and a study of their inter-relations—is of utmost significance in the world-view of Islam, for it enables us to comprehend better and better the fact that all creation is based upon a definite divine plan, and is thus apt to strengthen and deepen our conviction of God's existence and omnipotence. Since His eternal activity underlies all reality, the teachings of Islam attribute a quality of holiness to every research and endeavour aiming at a better understanding of the world around us and within us. The Prophet Muḥammad said, “Striving after knowledge is a sacred duty (*farīdah*) for every Muslim man and woman”; and, “If anybody goes on his way in search of knowledge, God will make easy

for him the way to Paradise"; and, "the superiority of the learned person over a [mere] worshipper is like the superiority of the moon on a night when it is full over [the light of] all the stars."

Since, as we know, all reality is a God-created unity, it follows that every scientific finding which is objectively proved to be true must *eo ipso* coincide with every truly religious tenet touching upon the nature of the universe. As far as the Qur'an is concerned, this inner coincidence between its statements and all such scientific findings as are proven beyond all possibility of doubt can be illustrated by many examples. To mention only a few, I would like to allude here to the doctrine of *evolution* referred to in the Qur'an again and again: the biological evolution of individual organisms (including the growth of the human embryo in its mother's womb) as well as the socio-historical evolution of human communities and civilisations; or to the innumerable Qur'anic references to the unceasing movement of all celestial bodies—stars, planets, solar systems and galaxies—and the mutual interdependence of their orbits; or to the principle of cause and effect which—as the Qur'an repeatedly states—underlies the being and the growth of all that exists.

In brief, it can safely be said that Islam is and has always been free of that "conflict between faith and science" which we so often encounter in other religions—for the simple reason that Islam does not *admit* of the existence of any conflict between religion and life as such, but rather recognises the fact that all intellectual activity is an inseparable element of life itself.

These observations are, I believe, sufficient to circumscribe the role which science plays in the over-all concept of Islam. However, we should not overlook a very important point: although science is well qualified to make us progressively comprehend something of the world around us and of the life within us, it is neither able nor called upon to pronounce a judgment regarding the *spiritual goal* of human life and thus to provide us with ethical guidance. In other words, the problem of ethical valuations—the problem of Good and Evil as well as the question as to how man should behave and what he should aim at—does not lie within the realm of science: it lies solely within the realm of religion. Science is no more than one of the instruments which man's intellect has at its disposal in order to find a better and better orientation within the observable universe; and religion—in the Islamic sense of this word—must and

does use this instrument in order to guide man towards a better and better spiritual and social existence.

4

(Q) *What role does emotion play in man's endeavour to approach the "other reality"? Are love of nature, art and literature, too, of importance for a religious comprehension of the universe?*

(A) As I have already stated, the Islamic conception does not admit of any "other" reality—that is, a supernatural category of existence in a hypothetical contrast—or even an antithesis—to those sectors of the universe which are *a priori* perceptible to us. For us, there is only *one* reality. Our comprehension of it can be widened and deepened by means of a conscious intellectual effort—for instance, empirical research or mathematical calculation—as well as through an intuitive perception of the inner links between certain phenomena which at first glance appear to be entirely unconnected. Man has undoubtedly the possibility to gain such intuitive flashes of insight by way of a loving observation of natural phenomena on which the Qur'an so emphatically insists: the alternation of day and night, the course of the winds, the sea's ebb and flow, the visible harmony of stellar orbits, the growth of a new leaf on a tree, the many-sided, ingenious formation of human and animal bodies, the amazing creation of a new living entity through the mating of male and female, the gradual development of the embryo in its mother's body, the immense creative abilities of the human mind, and the freedom of *choice* which reason vouchsafes to it. And it is *reason*, in particular, which is pointed out in countless Qur'anic statements and admonitions as the proper way that may lead us to a cognition of what is true and, hence, to faith. And so we are incessantly called upon to make the best possible use of our intellectual capacities, to think, to observe God's visible creation and to meditate upon the invisible one; and, finally, to endeavour to comprehend our own motivations as well as those of our fellow-beings. The whole of the Islamic doctrine tells us, as it were, "Think—and your reason will guide you to faith", instead of assuring us, as some other religions do, "Gain faith—and through your faith you will arrive at a comprehension of the truth". This difference of approach arises from the fact that the spiritual truths of which the Qur'an speaks have nothing in common with the

mysteries and highly involved and often incomprehensible dogmas underlying so many other religions: on the contrary, the Qur'anic teaching is always open to the human mind, irrespective of whether one approaches it through systematic reasoning or through intuition. It goes without saying that the latter is often associated with *emotion*, which frequently manifests itself—legitimately—in art and poetry. However, we are indirectly warned by the Qur'an not to allow emotion to become a kind of sentimental "crutch" in our search after religious cognition: for, in order not to be self-deceptive, emotion must be a *result* of cognition and not be considered a way to it.

5

(Q) Can the "other reality" be known by way of mystical experiences? Or can such a knowledge be attained through meditation? Is it conceivable that man's delving into the depths of his own Self may reveal to him much more than a mere understanding of the psychological factors responsible for the shaping of his personality and his character?

(A) The Qur'an makes it clear that our comprehension of reality can certainly be deepened and widened by what we describe as "mystical experience": in other words, through an intuitive, spiritual contact with the Divine and, hence, with those truths which are neither open to our self-perception nor can be fully grasped by analytical thinking. In this respect there is hardly any difference between the views of Islam and those of other great religions: all of them appear to be unanimous about the possibility of mystical spiritual experiences and cognitions. Seeing, however, that in every single instance such a possibility depends on the particular capabilities of the individual concerned as well as on the extremely variable factors responsible for his psychological "preparation", the teaching of Islam is very reticent as regards the methods by which a spiritual contact with the Absolute could be brought about and maintained. On one point only does Islam provide us with an explicit, albeit negative statement: it forbids all manner of ascetic self-mortification and world-renunciation, and denies the possibility of such practices bringing man closer to God. "There is no monastic world-renunciation (*rahbaniyyah*) in Islam", the Prophet Muhammad taught us, denying thereby all spiritual virtue to vol-

untary celibacy; and all schools of Islamic thought regard this teaching as an inviolable principle of faith: for in the Islamic world-view all life—spiritual as well as physical, intellectual as well as sensual—is God-willed and, therefore, essentially positive; and in the framework of such a world-view, every act of self-mortification is synonymous with a denial of God's gift and thus, by implication, of His plan of creation.

6

(Q) Can the "other reality" be described by means of the categories and concepts of our reality? Does the concept of "God" really imply a "Being" in a sense similar to our definition of "person", or is it only a cypher for something that is beyond all description? Which of the religious statements are to be understood literally, and which must be regarded as metaphorical, allegorical, symbolic or mythical?

(A) Since those aspects or sectors of reality which are beyond human perception are *eo ipso* outside all human experience, it follows that they cannot be circumscribed by categories and concepts resulting from human experience. For this reason the Qur'an states explicitly in *sūrah* 3:7: "In this [divine writ] are messages that are clear in and by themselves (*āyāt muḥkamāt*) as well as others that are allegorical (*mutashābihāt*).” On close study of the Qur'an it becomes obvious that all of its teachings and statements relating to man's ethical, moral and social behaviour belong to the category of "messages that are clear in and by themselves", whereas all references to those aspects of reality which lie beyond the reach of human perception and imagination and are, therefore, closed to man's cognitive experience, are of necessity expressed in an allegorical manner and must be understood by us in this sense. To this latter category belong, for instance, all references to God and His "attributes", the nature of the beings or powers described as "angels", man's life after death, the Day of Judgment, Paradise and Hell, and so on. However, it seems to me that the above-quoted Qur'anic statement cannot be properly understood unless one arrives at a comprehension of the nature and function of "allegory" as such. A true allegory—in contrast to a mere pictorial paraphrase of thoughts or ideas which could be equally well or perhaps even better expressed in direct terms—is invariably meant to convey in a figurative manner something which, because of its

many-layered complexity, can never be expressed in the form of a direct statement and can, therefore, be grasped only intuitively: that is to say, only as a metaphorical image and never as a series of detailed propositions. This characteristic of a true allegory holds good, in particular, of the Islamic concept of God who—as the Qur’ān says—is “sublimely exalted above anything that men may devise by way of definition” (*sūrah* 6:100). It is precisely for this reason that God can never be circumscribed and limited, as it were, by the concept of “person” in the humanly-semantic sense of this term. In order to express this impossibility, God speaks of Himself in the Qur’ān—often in one and the same sentence—as “I”, “We” and “He”, while the tenses of the respective verbs constantly vary between present, past and future. In view of the high precision so characteristic of the Arabic language—and especially the language of the Qur’ān—this flowing-together of the personal pronouns and tenses acquires an extraordinary significance: it implies a powerful, indirect statement that God exists in absolute infinity and timelessness and can never be imagined, described or even conceptually circumscribed.

7

(Q) *Is man a product of the natural development of all living beings as such, different from the animal world only in the sense in which animals are different from plants, or does he belong to a category which may be described as “supra-nature”?*

(A) According to the linguistic definition provided by the Arabic language—and therefore also by the Islamic doctrine, which is expressed in that language—man is an “animal” in the sense of organically belonging to that group of living beings which are endowed with the faculties of sensation, perception and movement, as well as in the sense of being dependent on physiological needs and functions more or less resembling those of other animal beings. But there is one element which differentiates man basically from all other animals: his *rational consciousness*—that is, his ability to form concepts and to bring them together in countless combinations by means of mental processes which can be directed and guided by his will. This uniqueness of human nature is brought out with great clarity in the Qur’anic parable (appearing in the second *sūrah*) of Adam and the angels: and particularly so because it is

obvious from the context that the name “Adam” circumscribes mankind as a whole. In that parable God proves to the angels that Adam is in one respect at least superior to them by virtue of his ability to “give names” to all things, whereas the angels cannot do this. All Arabic philologists agree in that the term “name” (*ism*) linguistically denotes “an expression which is meant to convey the knowledge of any object, concrete or abstract, by circumscribing its substance or its characteristics in such a way as to differentiate it from other objects”: in brief, *ism* is here synonymous with “concept”. Consequently, the ability to “give names to things” is a metaphor for man’s inborn faculty of logical definition and conceptual thinking. And it is this faculty alone which enables man—in contrast to all other living beings—to visualise *a priori* the consequences of his own activity and, thus, in every situation to arrive at a conscious choice between the various possibilities open to him regarding an action or an attitude. This freedom of choice presupposes, of course, a certain measure of free will—that is, a relative independence of purely animal instincts and urges—and therefore also *moral responsibility*. It is in these twin basic, natural factors of his existence that man’s uniqueness and true nature becomes fully apparent.

8

(Q) *Is that which we regard as man’s “soul” an entity separate or separable from his body, or is all that we circumscribe by this term but a function and expression of specific physiological processes?*

(A) The Qur’ān never refers to man’s “soul” in the sense of an entity separate from his biological existence. The Arabic word *nafs*, often (and inadequately) translated as “soul” or “spirit”, denotes not only the life-essence active in all sensate beings, but also the *individual identity* of every such being. With reference to man, this term usually signifies a “person” or a “self” in the sense of the integral unity of being which we describe as the “human personality”: in other words, the many-sided combination of the concrete, physical organism together with its mental qualities, its character, temperament, and so forth, *plus* that indefinable “something” which endows the body with life, and which is sometimes referred to in the Qur’ān as *rūh* as well (although in the Qur’anic usage this latter term is most often synonymous not so much with

“spirit” as with “inspiration” and, more particularly, “divine inspiration”). But whichever term we use, the inner relationship between this life-principle and the human or animal body is beyond the reach of our perception. With all this, however, it must be noted that Islam does not envisage any factual or potential *conflict* between man’s body and soul, inasmuch as it is only through an inter-action of these two elements that the human personality comes into being and persists.

9

(Q) *Is the human personality immortal, or does its supposed continuity after death consist only in a further development, on a new stage, of the elements and processes responsible for man’s existence? Is it possible to answer the question as to whether the individual human being has already existed, in whatever form it may have been, before his birth, and, accordingly, how we are to understand his continued existence after bodily death?*

(A) Nowhere in the Qur’ān do we find any allusion to man’s “immortality”. God alone is immortal and eternal, whereas all His creation is, in accordance with His Will, but transitory, bound to pass away sooner or later. None the less, the Qur’ān speaks again and again of a *continuation* of life after death—that is, of the fact that the death of the body is not an end of human existence but, rather, the beginning of a new stage of indeterminate duration. This new beginning is described in the Qur’ān as “resurrection”—namely, a resurrection of the *entire* human “personality” in the sense alluded to in my answer to the preceding question. It is, of course, impossible for us to state or even to imagine with what kind of organism that resurrected personality will be endowed. All Qur’anic references to our life after death are expressed in allegories: this is unavoidable for the simple reason that they are conveyed to us by means of a human language and are, therefore, formulated on the basis of concepts arising from human experiences gained in this, our present, life. However, *one* aspect of our life after what is called “death” is constantly, and with great stress, referred to in the Qur’ān: the uninterrupted continuation of *individual consciousness*. In this respect there is not the least break between man’s existence before and after bodily death. However much our biological organism may change on resurrection (and quite in-

dependently of the question as to whether at that point there will be anything like a “biological organism” in the sense of our present experiences), the Qur’ān declares repeatedly that every one of us is destined to continue as a *person* and to carry over his consciousness—and, thus, the moral responsibility for his past actions as well—into the new form of existence. This continuation of consciousness will at that stage be accompanied by an immense widening of our faculty of perception and, hence, will result in a great intensification of our feeling of responsibility for all that we did before death. In this context, all Qur’anic statements about man’s happiness or suffering in the new phase of his life—symbolised as Paradise and Hell—gain a meaning which goes far beyond and above the conventional concepts of “reward” or “punishment”: namely, man’s condition after resurrection reveals itself as the unavoidable *consequence* of his right or wrong actions and attitudes during the life-phase preceding death—an organic, progressive development, albeit on an incomparably higher level, of his past existence. As to whether at this new stage of life still further goals may possibly be set to human development is a question which we can answer only after having gained new spiritual insights on resurrection.

10

(Q) *Wherein is to be sought man’s salvation? In the highest possible development and perfection of his natural predisposition as well as in the best possible fulfilment of the tasks morally enjoined upon him by his time and environment, or in a concentration on such of his abilities and virtues as may cause him to come into contact with the “other reality” and prepare him for it? Is it predominantly important that one should always endeavour to find out how other religions define man’s way to salvation, or is it more important to behave throughout one’s life in accordance with the ethical demands of his own religion alone?*

(A) Before answering the above question, I may mention two fundamental Islamic principles connected with the problem of “salvation”. Firstly, the concept of “original sin” in the Christian sense is entirely alien to Islam and is, moreover, categorically rejected by its teachings: for, man is accountable only for his own behaviour and not for the sins of his forebears—or, in the oft-repeated words

of the Qur'ān: "No human being is called upon to bear another's burden" (*sūrah* 6:164; cf. also 17:15, 35:18, 39:7 and 53:38). For this reason man's "salvation" cannot possibly depend on "vicarious atonement"—as is the case in Christianity—in order to free himself from an allegedly "inherited" moral taint. Secondly, Islam denies explicitly the existence of an inborn conflict between body and spirit—a conflict which in the Christian doctrine is held to be at the root of the so-called "original sin"—but regards those two aspects of the human personality as God-willed and, therefore, equally positive, inseparable elements of man's nature. Thus, his "salvation" does not presuppose a renunciation or rejection of the legitimate urges of the body but, rather, their submission to the demands of the spirit and the dictates of conscience.

As soon as we consider these two premisses—the rejection of the principle of "original sin" and the denial of an inborn conflict between body and spirit—we realise that in Islam the concept of "salvation" can have only *one* meaning: a fusion of spirit and flesh, thought and action, inclination and actual behaviour into a harmonious unity of being distinguished by what we describe as "moral equity" (*ādīl*) or "righteousness" (*ma'rūf*)—namely, man's righteousness before God and himself (consisting in the endeavour to surrender his own self entirely to the revealed Will of God and fully to develop his own God-given, positive qualities); and righteousness towards one's fellow-men (expressed in a constant endeavour to help them in their moral development, to safeguard their rights, and to work for a steady improvement of their social conditions). He or she who fulfils these demands attains to salvation in the Islamic sense. For thus it is that Islam does not attribute any essential value to faith alone unless it leads to, and is accompanied by, righteous *actions* as well. It follows, therefore, that it is the innermost purpose of the Qur'anic call to faith to enable man to live physically and spiritually as well as individually and socially in a morally equitable manner. In other words, a cognition of religious truths is in Islam not an end in itself but rather a way to what is ethically good and positive in this life and, consequently, to happiness in the life to come.

(Q) *What significance have suffering and happiness for man's spiri-*

tual improvement? Should he endeavour to achieve a happy life for himself and for others, patiently accepting conflicts and sufferings which are unavoidable owing to the intrinsic imperfection of the human condition—or should he, in order to test and purify his own self, if not aim at deliberately creating situations which are bound to cause suffering, at least not to try to prevent them or, if they already exist, not to try to do away with them?

(A) If we bear in mind that the term "Islam" literally denotes "self-surrender", namely, one's self-surrender to God, we are bound to realise that in the Islamic world-view both happiness and suffering must have a direct bearing on the problem of man's ethical development. To accept happiness with gratitude as an unexpected gift from God and not as a kind of "reward" for our presumed righteousness, as well as to do our best to make our fellow-humans share in this our happiness; and to bear all suffering without complaint as something God-willed, as well as to do our best to spare others a similar suffering: in these two demands the ethical outlook of Islam reveals itself most distinctly. Man has undoubtedly a moral right to aim at happiness—but never at the expense of others; and he has the moral duty to strive, in accordance with his best ability, for a removal of the conflicts and an alleviation of the suffering to which mankind is always exposed because of its weaknesses and imperfections as well as because of natural circumstances beyond all human control. This moral duty arises from the Qur'anic doctrine that both our individual and social life are always capable of improvement, providing that we endeavour to attune our behaviour to the positive faculties which God has bestowed on our minds and our bodies: and this is the reason why Islam so emphatically rejects all self-mortification and world-renunciation, and why it so sharply condemns all passivity in the face of other people's suffering.

In brief, whenever it cannot be avoided, suffering must be borne with patience; and whenever it becomes absolutely necessary that an individual should suffer for the sake of the community, he must willingly take this suffering upon himself: but never is he supposed or allowed to *seek out* suffering for the sake of mere suffering.

(Q) *Does the history of mankind show any real development in the*

sense of progress? Can we observe any growth in humanity and wisdom side by side with scientific and technological progress?

(A) As a study of history shows us—and as the Qur’ān clearly points out—mankind does not display any *collective* progress in the realm of ethical wisdom—for the simple reason that “mankind” is but a multiplication of individual beings and not a spiritual entity as such. All social progress is strictly confined to the sphere of empirical knowledge. It is obvious that the sum-total of mankind’s collective, empirically achieved knowledge—expressed in science, technology and organisation—is steadily growing because its elements are easily communicable and can, therefore, be accumulated in the thinking, and reproduced in the doing, of an unlimited number of individuals. The situation is, however, entirely different with regard to progress in the spiritual and ethical sense of these terms: such a progress always depends on the feeling and the will of each individual, and its elements can neither be directly transmitted by one person to another nor accumulated in such a way as to result in mankind’s collective “possession”. We can, of course, individually benefit by the spiritual experiences of other individuals if and when these experiences are communicated to us: and this, in fact, is the reason why most of the sacred scriptures, including the Qur’ān, so often refer to the spiritual insights of those extraordinary personalities described as “prophets”. But one should never forget that such a possibility of one individual’s deriving a spiritual benefit from another person’s experiences consists solely in the *influence* which the latter may have on the former and not in a direct *transference* of those experiences. In other words, the thoughts or feelings expressed by God-elected men like Abraham, Moses, Jesus or Muḥammad can certainly act as a powerful impulse on our own feelings and attitudes, but cannot automatically, as it were, bring forth similar feelings or attitudes in ourselves. And since the spiritual experiences of one person can never be transferred to another person, they cannot be collectively utilised and—as is the case with elements of empirical knowledge—in the course of time augmented and improved: they can but serve as a means of *guidance* for other individuals. And thus it is that we can speak of spiritual and ethical progress always only with reference to individual human beings, and never to “mankind” as a whole.

II. THE ATTITUDE OF RELIGIONS TOWARDS ONE ANOTHER

13

(Q) *Do the fundamental doctrines of all religions contain truths? Are some religions more or less true, or can only one be true whereas all the others are false? Is there a difference between “religion” and “faith”?*

(A) The historical continuation of and inner connection between the various forms and phases of divine revelation is one of the most important themes in Islamic doctrine. According to the Qur’ān, God has in the course of time brought forth prophets from within every single community or cultural entity—messengers who preached one and the same basic truth: namely, that there is only One God, in whose divinity no other being has any, even the most insignificant, share; and that man is responsible to Him for all his actions and conscious endeavours. Many of those prophets are mentioned in the Qur’ān by name; but we are also told that besides these there have been countless others as well. Among those great spiritual guides whose names are given in the Qur’ān, all the Biblical prophets—foremost among them Abraham, Moses and Jesus—are spoken of side by side with the Prophet Muḥammad. The essence of their teachings was always identical; and so it can be said that all of them proclaimed one and the same faith. However, God tells us in the Qur’ān: “For every one of you [i.e., for every one of your communities] have We appointed a [different] divine law and an open road” (*sūrah* 5:48).

The meaning of this statement is this: Although the eternal truths preached by all of God’s messengers have always been the same, their messages differed in respect of the body of *laws* ordained through each of them, leaving to every community a free

choice ("an open road") as regards its way of life—and this in view of the varying exigencies of time and of the stage of social development characterising each of those communities or civilisations. Finally, however, mankind as such reached a stage of intellectual preparation which enabled it to comprehend and to accept a universal system of divine laws which could be valid for *all* times and under *all* circumstances: and this, combined with the undeniable fact that none of the earlier sacred scriptures has remained free of considerable and often deliberate alterations, was the reason for the revelation of the Qur'ān. Because of the universal, timeless applicability of its teachings the Qur'ān represents the summit of all divine revelation and, thus, the most perfect way to man's spiritual and social fulfilment; and because the text of the divine message promulgated through Muḥammad has never been and never will be altered, he is the last or, as the Qur'ān describes him, the "seal" of all prophets. This uniqueness of the Qur'ān and of the person who proclaimed it does not, however, contradict the fact that certain eternal verities *do* endure in earlier revealed religions and that, consequently, their sincere followers can be regarded as "righteous" in the Qur'anic sense of this term as well—provided that they believe in God's transcendental oneness and uniqueness, are fully conscious of their responsibility to Him, and really live in accordance with these tenets. To make this point absolutely clear, the Qur'ān repeatedly says:

"Verily, those who have attained to faith [in this divine writ], as well as those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Christians, and the Sabians—all who believe in God and the Last Day and do righteous deeds—shall have their reward with their Sustainer, and no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve" (sūrah 2:62).

14

(Q) *Does the cognition of the verity of a religion depend on the intellectual or moral maturity of an individual as such? Is a religious comprehension of world and life always dependent on the particular character, the particular intelligence and the particular degree of consciousness of the person concerned, possibly in the same manner in which various popular religions are but mirrors of the character and the situation of the society in which they have come into being?*

Or is there a religion which could be regarded as valid and true for all people, at all times?

(A) As I have pointed out in my answer to the question preceding this one, the Qur'ān recognises the belief in God's transcendental oneness and uniqueness as the only true and in the religious sense acceptable faith; and the same Qur'ān stresses again and again that a cognition of this fundamental truth is open to every mature, mentally sound human being. Now it goes without saying that the way and manner in which an intellectually simple person conceives God's Being must differ in many respects from the conception of a philosopher. But provided that both are equally sincere, the difference between their conceptions consists, essentially, only in a difference between two degrees of consciousness and knowledge and has nothing to do with the question as to whether the *faith* of either of these two persons is genuine and complete. The believing philosopher is, of course, in a position to support his intellectual perception of God's oneness and almightiness by his far-reaching knowledge of natural occurrences, of history and of human psychology, of the way in which human societies are formed, and so on; but the same holds good, on his own level, of the "simple", uneducated believer, even though he may not have a comparable intellectual apparatus at his disposal: for, although his world-view is inevitably narrower than that of a philosopher, it need not be less "true" in the subjective sense of this term. And so it can be said that the faith both of a philosopher and of an entirely uneducated person attains to completeness and validity as soon as either of them is able to connect his particular perception of reality with his cognition of the existence of the One God, in whose divinity none and nothing has a share. Conversely, without such a cognition, no faith—whatever its formulation—can be considered true in the Qur'anic sense of this word.

15

(Q) *If there is a religion which may be said to contain and express the ultimate truth, how does it happen that not all human beings accept it as soon as they become acquainted with it?*

(A) Although there are many religions, there exists only *one* religious truth: the existence of the One and Only God, who again and again reveals His Being to us in His perceptible creation and.

more explicitly, through the instrumentality of His chosen messengers, the prophets. The fact that not all human beings can be or are willing to accept this truth is due to various causes. One of them is the unwillingness of so many people to surrender themselves to the idea of the Absolute and, hence, to submit their own lives to ethical and moral imperatives which often conflict with what such people regard as directly "advantageous" to their own material or social interests. Another, more prevalent cause may be found in certain influences to which these people were exposed from their very childhood: for instance, in early "inherited" religious doctrines which had long ago strayed from the fundamental truth of God's oneness and uniqueness and now force their adherents to grope about in a labyrinth of enigmatic dogmas and mysteries which are, by their very nature, beyond man's intellectual grasp and cannot, therefore, always satisfy a searching mind. None the less, such religious teachings exert a kind of nostalgic attraction on people who had grown up under their influence and have never encountered another religious proposition—so much so that they cannot now approach *any* religious problem independently of what they had come to regard as *the* truth during their childhood and adolescence. And, finally, just as there are people who have no "ear" for music, there are such as have never experienced any urge to search after spiritual truths, and have always lost themselves in mere material, "practical" concerns; and of such people the Qur'an says:

"The parable of those who are bent on denying the truth is that of the beast which hears the shepherd's cry, and hears in it nothing but the sound of a voice and a call.* Deaf are they, and dumb, and blind: for they do not use their reason" (*sūrah* 2:171).

16

(Q) *How can we explain the rise, within every single religion, of various, often widely divergent tendencies and schools of thought? What significance has the existence of these different tendencies with regard to the particular religion's claim to represent the ultimate truth?*

* For a literal translation of the highly elliptic phrase freely rendered above, see Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an*, p. 35, note 138.

(A) Different individuals frequently approach one and the same problem in a different manner and, consequently, arrive at more or less divergent answers. This, however, does not in the least invalidate a religion's claim to represent the truth—for the simple reason that every truth has many facets. The Qur'an says: "God guides [lit., "has guided"] the believers unto the truth about which, by His leave, they had disagreed" (*sūrah* 2:213); and the Prophet Muḥammad is reported to have said: "The differences of opinion among the learned within my community are [a sign of God's] grace."

The above-quoted Qur'anic statement with its explicit reference to "God's leave" or "permission", as well as the—obviously explanatory—saying of the Prophet, stress the fact that the diversity evident in all human thought-processes is an entirely natural and unavoidable phenomenon, and that without such a diversity man's intellectual progress would be inconceivable. For this reason alone, if for no other, there is no ideological opening in Islam for the concept of a "church" in the sense of an institutionalised system of "authoritative" interpretations of this or that point of doctrine; and, consequently, in all the history of Islam there has never been a moment when individual thinking about and re-thinking of theological problems has ceased to be a living issue for truly creative scholars. And so it has come about that there are a number of schools of thought in Islam; but provided that such "schools" or tendencies are based *solely* on the Qur'an and the authentic sayings of the Prophet, they are "legitimate" from the doctrinal point of view and do not—cannot—contradict one another in any fundamental proposition of the Faith.

17

(Q) *Can man's religious predisposition and spiritual destiny be realised solely through his acceptance of one or another of the historic religions, or can he find an individual answer to religious problems independently of any of the existing religions? And is an intellectual comprehension of religious problems a pre-condition for the attainment to truth faith?*

(A) In a certain sense, this question can be answered by the meaning of the very term *Islam*. Literally, this word denotes "self-

surrender" and, in the deeper sense, "man's self-surrender to God". As soon as we become fully aware that God exists, and thereupon surrender ourselves to Him both in our faith and in our attitudes, we fulfil the meaning of our life. Certain exceptionally-gifted individuals are sometimes able to attain to such a spiritual and intellectual fulfilment through personal intuition alone; the far greater majority of human beings, however, cannot achieve this without external help: and such a help is offered to them in the shape of divine *revelation*—the revelation granted to God's prophets. This twofold fact of intuition and revelation is impressively illustrated in the famous allegorical story *Ḥayy bin Yaqzān* ("The Living, son of The Wide-Awake") composed in the 12th century by the Arab philosopher Ibn Ṭufayl. In his search for spiritual perfection, the fictional narrator of that romantic story lands on an apparently uninhabited island and encounters a man who has lived there alone since his earliest childhood, cut off from all intercourse with other human beings. This man—Ḥayy bin Yaqzān—has gradually, in intimate contact with nature and with no other aid than the inborn, uncorrupted powers of his intellect, arrived at the highest level of thinking and perception, and thus achieved an insight into God's existence. He has passed through all degrees of intuitive cognition and has now reached a stage where the universe is clearly understandable to him as an evidence of God's creativeness; and in the end he finds that his own philosophy—arrived at without prophets or direct divine revelation—is in all its essentials identical with that Islam which his new-found friend, the narrator, professes. Some time later, after his return to inhabited regions and thus to human society, Ḥayy bin Yaqzān realises that his own way of life and thought was quite exceptional, and that for the overwhelming majority of human beings the guidance offered by the Qur'ān and the Prophet Muḥammad is *the* way to the truth: for, in the life of most people, faith can only be awakened and maintained by definite divine statements and laws, by moral admonition, and by the allegory of reward and punishment in the life to come. But whatever the way, the goal is—and must always remain—the same: man's self-surrender to God.

18

(Q) *Should a religious community always aim at maintaining its*

social and political privileges, or should it forgo all claim to privileges as such and seek, instead, to obtain the free assent of each individual, confining itself to an influence corresponding to the number of true believers?

(A) The Qur'ān says: "There shall be no coercion in matters of faith" (*sūrah* 2:256). This emphatic postulate implies, firstly, that the acceptance of Islam by an individual must be based on that individual's free choice; secondly, all Islamic jurists (*fuqahā'*), without any exception, hold that forcible conversion is under all circumstances null and void and that, moreover, any *attempt* at forcing a non-believer to accept the faith of Islam is a grievous sin (which, by the way, disposes of the widespread fallacy that Islam places before the non-believers the alternative of "conversion or the sword"); and, thirdly, that the Muslim community (*ummah*) has no right whatsoever to undermine either the social structure or the religious and cultural freedom of the non-Muslim minorities living in its midst, or to deprive them of their civic rights. These principles have been most clearly impressed by the Prophet Muḥammad upon his followers, with the result that in the course of time there has grown up a special branch of Islamic jurisprudence devoted to the protection of the rights of non-Muslim minorities. However, since in Islam there is no separation between "mundane" and "religious" spheres of life, Islam claims for itself the right to provide the basis of the legal system in all countries which are exclusively, or in a great majority, inhabited by Muslims—and this, of course, on the premiss that the legal system of Islam comprises *eo ipso* all necessary provisions for the protection of non-Muslim citizens.

19

(Q) *Is it conceivable that in time we could arrive not merely at a dialogue and a mutual analysis of the various religious systems, but rather at an approximation and ultimate fusion of all those systems—or will such an approximation lead to the victory of one particular religion and the disappearance of all the others? What are the indications in this respect in the context of today's situation?*

(A) From the Islamic point of view, a dialogue between the monotheistic religions is always most desirable inasmuch as it might lead to a mutual understanding—and, therefore, approximation—on

The Answers of Islam

the basis of those principles of faith which are common to all of us. The Qur'ān is quite explicit on this point:

“Say: ‘O followers of [earlier] revelations (*ahl al-kitāb*): Come unto that tenet which we and you hold in common: that we shall worship none but God, and that we shall not ascribe divinity to aught beside Him, and that we shall not take human beings [lit., ‘one another’] for our lords beside God’” (*sūrah* 3:64).

A doctrinal agreement on this basis would, as we Muslims see it, fulfil the essential demand of all true faith, and thus enable mankind better to resist the forces of utter materialism which—irrespective of whether they come from the East or the West—threaten to destroy man’s spirit and, ultimately, the entire world. Seeing that the Qur’ān forbids us in severe terms to show the least disrespect to the person or the memory of any of the earlier prophets, we Muslims naturally expect our non-Muslim friends to adopt a similar attitude with regard to our Prophet Muḥammad; and if they do not find it possible to recognise him as a prophet (as we recognise the prophethood of Abraham, Moses and Jesus and all the other sacred personalities of the Bible), they should at least treat his name with all the respect which is obviously due to a human being of so deep a God-consciousness and so total a self-surrender to God as our Prophet undoubtedly was. As soon as this common-sense demand of ours is fulfilled, the three great monotheistic religions will automatically come much closer to one another. It must, however, always be borne in mind that we Muslims can never lose sight of the fundamental principle of Islam—the doctrine that God is one and unique, that none has a share in His divinity, and that Muḥammad was called upon by Him to proclaim this truth to all the world.

III. RELIGION AND HUMANITARIANISM

20

(Q) *What is the relationship between a person’s profession of a religious faith and his behaviour in the realm of ethics? Can one be truly humane only if one adheres to a particular religion, or is man’s ability to be humanitarian quite independent of any religious notions and perceptions?*

(A) In my opinion, the innermost purpose of every higher religion consists in guiding man towards a “good life” in the ethical sense of this phrase: hence, faith and ethics are invariably—and most closely—connected. We must, however, always bear in mind that the core of what we describe as a “religious experience” is, primarily, an intuitive conviction that everything which exists or is about to come into existence is the result of *one* conscious, creative, all-embracing Will; and, secondly, the believer’s endeavour to attain to a spiritual and intellectual harmony with the demands of that Will. It is only on the basis of such a conviction and such an endeavour that man becomes able to conceive of standards of moral and ethical valuations independent of all time-bound social changes: in other words, to differentiate between Good and Evil in the permanent sense of these terms. Whenever we cease to believe that an absolute, consciously-planning Will is active within every manifestation, perceivable or imperceivable, of the universe as a whole, we lose all logical reason for the assumption that any of our endeavours and actions could be *per se*, in its essence, right or wrong, moral or immoral. Thus, in the absence of such a faith, the very concept of ethics and morality loses in time all its meaning, and our views as to the righteousness or unrighteousness of human actions dissolve gradually into a series of vague, pragmatic, habit-conditioned rules of behaviour—rules which become more and

more dependent on the question as to whether this or that action of the person concerned—or of the social group to which that person belongs—is useful or harmful from a *practical* point of view. And so, Right and Wrong, Good and Evil, are imperceptibly transformed into purely *relative* concepts which may always be interpreted in an arbitrary manner according to a person's or a society's presumed needs; as a matter of fact, such "expedient" concepts *must* be constantly re-interpreted in accordance with the time-conditioned changes—social, economic and technological—to which all human life is subject.

From whatever point of view we consider this problem, we find that in all historic periods *religion* was the only source of ethics and morality. No alternative source has until this day been discovered; and neither do we have the least indication that "non-religious" ethics will ever become conceivable. One could, of course, object to this statement by pointing out that a good many agnostics and atheists are undoubtedly imbued with deep moral convictions and that, consequently, one *can* have such convictions without having any religious faith. However, those who argue on these lines usually overlook the psychological fact that the moral concepts and valuations held by an individual human being are not simply the result of his own thinking and feeling but are invariably—and to a very great extent—rooted in thoughts and moral valuations which he has inherited from earlier generations through the medium of his cultural environment. In logical continuation of this finding one may safely assert that the positive ethical and moral convictions of our atheistic contemporaries are in reality (and in a very high degree) an unconscious heritage derived from those innumerable forebears whose world-view was based on their faith in the existence of a planning Divine Will: in short, a *religious* faith. How long—that is, through how many subsequent generations—this heritage can remain alive without any further religious nourishment is obviously a question which only the future can answer.

21

(Q) *Should the adherents of a religious faith, in order to live fully in accordance with its demands, keep themselves as much as possible apart from those professing another faith, or are there spheres of life*

in which all people, regardless of their various convictions, should dwell together and cooperate? Is living together with non-believers or adherents of another faith a necessary evil for a true believer, or is it a humane task independent of all differences in matters of faith?

(A) The Muslims do not believe that it is necessary or even desirable to live apart from non-Muslims. They do believe that they are duty-bound to communicate and explain the tenets of their faith to all people who are as yet unaware of what it portends; and in order to be able to do this, they obviously *must* live in steady contact with non-Muslims. Moreover, the Qur'an says:

"If God had so willed, He could surely have made you all one single [religious] community; but [He willed it otherwise] in order to test you by means of whatever [revelation] He had vouchsafed unto you. Vie, then, with one another in doing good works!" (sūrah 5:48).

Consequently, living together and working together with adherents of other faiths or even people without any faith is for a Muslim not a "necessary evil" but, rather, an ethical demand.

22

(Q) *Are there ethical values which may be considered uniformly valid and binding for all nations and individuals of our time, or at least for all nations and individuals belonging to the civilised world? Do, for instance, the basic human rights postulated in the U.N. Charter and in the constitutions of the Occidental countries possess the character of such uniformly-binding norms? What contribution do the various religious communities offer towards the furthering and the maintenance of those commonly-held values?*

(A) There is no doubt that many ethical values—like truthfulness, kindness, justice and so forth—are regarded by most communities and individuals as morally valid and generally binding; in this respect there hardly exists any difference of opinion among the higher religions. The U.N. Charter has evidently been derived from such generally-valid norms and should, therefore, be cherished and continuously improved upon by all people of good will, whatever be their religious convictions.

(Q) *Is there a danger that the unification of moral values and ethical concepts, spoken of in the preceding question and answer, might sooner or later lead to a unification of the various religions as such?*

(A) As I have already stated, a mutual approximation of the various religious concepts and ideas appears to us Muslims as very desirable—provided, always, that such an approximation is based on a general affirmation of a belief in God's oneness and uniqueness—a belief which for us represents the *only possible* and acceptable norm of faith. Hence, we do not regard the possibility of such a development with apprehension but, on the contrary, welcome it with hope and expectation. However, one must not overlook the fact that the present-day tendency towards a unification of all concepts of life and moral values, discernible in almost all parts of the world, is by no means conducive to the goal visualised by us: for this growing tendency towards "unification" is not so much the result of an approximation in the sphere of positive ethical values as, rather, of the ubiquitous, steadily-rising worship of material things and amenities—that is to say, of non-ethical values. In other words, men's ideas and valuations tend to become more and more similar everywhere because most people, all over the world, are increasingly striving after material goals alone, and not because they aim at one and the same spiritual truth. Looked at from this point of view, the growing approximation of men's concepts is, in fact, a danger—and not merely a danger to this or that religion, but to every religious world-view as such.

IV. RELIGION AND SOCIETY

(Q) *Is it the duty of the state to safeguard each individual's freedom of conscience and faith—or should the state remain secular—that is, completely aloof from all aspects of religious life—and simply delegate the duty of supervision and education in all religious questions to the existing religious communities?*

(A) Within the Islamic concept of society there is no room for the concept of a "secular" state for the simple reason that Islam does not admit of any separation between "religious" and "mundane" life-concerns. Consequently, Islam considers it a duty of the state to keep the religious upbringing of its citizens always in view. In the public schools of a country in which all or a great majority of the population are Muslims, religious instruction should be an indispensable, obligatory part of the curriculum for all Muslim pupils; and since the Islamic State is duty-bound to safeguard and protect the cultural concerns of *all* its citizens regardless of their religious affiliation, the same possibilities must be open to non-Muslim communities as well. Now as regards the religious teaching of non-Muslim pupils in public schools, the right and duty of guidance and instruction must be left to the leaders of the communities concerned.

(Q) *What role, if any, should theology—and the study of religions in general—play within the concept of the university? Should the university keep itself free from all links with any religious system, or has there, too, the religious education of adherents of a particular faith its legitimate place?*

(A) Since theology (in the widest sense of this term) is most closely connected with the problem of *knowledge* as such, Islam naturally demands that it should be one of the subjects taught at the universities of Muslim countries; and the same holds good of what is described as "comparative religion"—that is, the study of the origins, the development and the inter-relations of the various religious systems. Similar to what I have earlier said about the teaching of religion in public schools, in the universities, too, the principle of the "dominant religion" should generally be applied: in other words, the theology taught at state universities should be based on the religious doctrines professed by the majority of the citizens of the country concerned, with the proviso that all confessional minorities should have the right to establish and to run, within the framework of the university, special institutes devoted to the study of their own religion.

(Q) *Do the tenets of a particular religion postulate definite attitudes towards political, social and economic problems—for instance, capitalism, socialism or liberalism—towards democracy, or towards the question of atomic armament, etc.?*

(A) As seen from the Islamic point of view, the answers to many—if not most—political and economic questions depend on time-conditioned factors and circumstances; and since these are extremely variable, none of such answers can remain valid for all times and in all circumstances. This is fully in tune with the Qur'anic teaching that all life, in whatever form, is subject to constant evolution. None the less, Islamic Law offers us certain clearly-defined, unchangeable principles with which our time-bound "answers" must accord in order to be considered Islamic: for instance, the principle of juridical and social justice, the prohibition of any kind of exploitation of man by man, the principle of public consensus and consultation as the basis of state and government, freedom of opinion, the right of ownership of movable and immovable property (with the proviso, however, that the public good stands above all private interests), the state's responsibility for the welfare of all its citizens and, in particular, for the maintenance of all persons who are unable to care for themselves for reasons beyond their control, and so forth. The Muslims are

morally obliged to work out, on the basis of such unchangeable principles, practical answers which would be commensurate with the demands of their time and their socio-economic circumstances, and to re-formulate those answers again and again in accordance with the unceasing changes in all human life.

JERUSALEM: *The Open City*

(Talk sent for delivery at a conference of the
Muslim Students Association, U.S.A.,
in the late 1970s)

IT GOES without saying that the most important prerequisite for a mutual understanding between the Muslim world and the West is a correct appreciation of, and respect for, each others' ethical and social values; and next in importance, a mutual appreciation of what touches most strongly upon our emotions.

For the Muslim of today, such an emotional issue is the question of Palestine and, more particularly, the question of Jerusalem. While none of us denies that this city—the third of the Holy Cities of Islam—must always be open to Jews and Christians as well, we cannot ever reconcile ourselves to the view, so complacently accepted in the West, that Jerusalem is to be the capital of the State of Israel. If we are ever to arrive at a truly fruitful cooperation, both cultural and political, between the world of Islam and the West, the latter must become fully aware of what Jerusalem means not only to the Jews but also to us Muslims. Just as Mecca represents to us the focal point of the Islamic faith and unity, so Jerusalem is to us Muslims a symbol of the wider community of *all* believers in the One God.

The very concept of Jerusalem as an open city is based on the fact of its sacredness to the three great monotheistic religions—Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In practical terms, this implies that free access to it and freedom of worship within its precincts must be *guaranteed* to the followers of all these three religions; and it must be safeguarded not merely as a result of “tolerance” on the part of one of these religious communities towards the two others but as an inviolable *moral right* of each and all of them.

In Islam, this principle is anchored ideologically in the Qur'anic

doctrine of the continuity of man's religious experience and of divine revelation. The Qur'ān stresses again and again that the faith preached by the Prophet Muḥammad is not a "new" one: its fundamental spiritual premisses—foremost among them the recognition of God's oneness and uniqueness—are the same as those preached by all of God's prophets since the dawn of man's consciousness. In other words, whether it was Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus or Muḥammad, all of them postulated man's self-surrender to God (which, by the way, is the literal meaning of the term "Islam") as the beginning and the end of all true religion. Basing its doctrine on this—to a Muslim—undisputable fact, the Qur'ān repeatedly calls upon the Faithful to proclaim: "We believe in God, and in that which has been bestowed from on high upon us, and in that which has been bestowed upon Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and their descendants, and that which has been vouchsafed to Moses and Jesus, and that which has been vouchsafed to all the [other] prophets by their Sustainer: we make no distinction between any of them" (*sūrah*.2:136).

It follows, therefore, that reverence for *all* the prophets is a basic postulate of Islam, notwithstanding the difference in some of the laws promulgated by them in accordance with the exigencies of their times and their communities' cultural development. Thus, any offence against the person or the memory of any of the earlier prophets constitutes, from the Islamic point of view, an offence against the will of God as revealed through the Qur'ān; and to abuse—or even to show lack of respect for—any of those earlier prophets is equivalent to abusing or showing disrespect to the Qur'ān itself and to the memory of the Prophet Muḥammad, through whom this divine writ was revealed to the world.

But the Qur'ān goes even further than this, and exhorts its followers: "Do not revile those [beings] whom they invoke instead of God" (*sūrah* 6:108). This categorical prohibition of reviling anything that other people hold sacred—even if it be in clear contravention of the principle of God's oneness and uniqueness—implies that while Muslims are expected to argue against what the Qur'ān describes as erroneous beliefs, they are not allowed to *abuse* the objects of those beliefs and thereby to hurt the feelings of their erring fellow-men. This prohibition relates both to persons to whom (in the viewpoint of the Qur'ān, unjustifiably) quasi-divine

qualities are ascribed by their votaries, as well as to their inanimate representations, including the shrines devoted to their memory.

Historically, this Islamic morality has always been manifested in recognition by the Muslims—Arabs and non-Arabs alike—of the right of Jews and Christians to worship freely, in accordance with their own beliefs and customs, in the holy places in Jerusalem (and, by the way, in all other places of the Holy Land sanctified by their respective religious traditions). Thus, to a Muslim, Jerusalem is and always has been an open city.

Now the question arises: How is the "openness" of Jerusalem to be safeguarded, apart from present-day—and possibly ephemeral—political constellations and considerations? In other words: who could or, rather, *should* be the guarantor of its "openness"?

It is obvious that this question cannot be divorced from the larger problem of the country in which Jerusalem is situated: that is, the problem of Palestine itself and of its rightful inhabitants.

I should like to point out that I am referring here to "rightfulness" not merely in the abstract, moral sense of this term but also in the specific connotation arising from the millennial history of Palestine as such. At first glance it might appear—and this has always been stressed by the supporters of the idea of a Zionist state both among the Jews and their sympathisers in the West—that the Jews, who were settled in Palestine for several centuries in the pre-Christian era and were driven from that land by the Romans nearly two thousand years ago, have a prior—moral as well as historical—claim to it. However, the fallacy of this view becomes apparent as soon as we remember that history is filled with mass displacements of populations, and that, therefore, there can be no valid "claim" of any people to any country after a dispossession lasting for many centuries or even, as in the case of the Israelites, for nearly two thousand years. If moral validity could be attributed to such a "claim", then the Arabs could claim, with equal validity, the return to them of Spain, over most of which they ruled for more than seven centuries and which they lost entirely only five centuries ago. But no Arab in his senses would ever raise such a fantastic claim, even in theory, knowing well that the reversion of Spain to the Christian Spaniards is a historical fact, sanctioned by the lapse of centuries, and therefore politically uncontestable in spite of the strong emotional links which still tie us to the memory of Muslim Spain.

Moreover, in the case of Palestine the question of "rightful possession" appears in yet another dimension. We must not forget that when the Hebrews gradually conquered Palestine in the last millennium B.C., they did not come to an *empty* country. Long before them, many other Semitic and non-Semitic tribes were settled there—the Amorites, the Edomites, the Philistines, the Moabites, the Hittites, and so on. Those tribes continued living there after the conquest of Palestine by the Hebrews, and later, in the days of the kingdom of Israel and Judah. They continued living there after the Romans had driven the Jews away in the first century of the Christian era. They *are* living there—or in refugee camps nearby—to this day: and they are called "Palestinian Arabs". They are a definite ethnic group which is by no means identical with the Arabs of the Arabian Peninsula who conquered Palestine from the Byzantines in the seventh century of the Christian era. Those "Arabian" Arabs were always only a small minority among the population; the overwhelming majority of what we describe today as Palestinian "Arabs" are in reality only the *Arabianised*, original inhabitants of the country. In the course of centuries many of them became Muslims, others remained Christians; the Muslims among them frequently intermarried with their co-religionists from Arabia; and all of them, Muslims and Christians alike, gradually adopted the Arabic language and merged into the orbit of Arab civilisation. In short, the Palestinians—like most of the inhabitants of the present-day Arab world outside the Arabian Peninsula proper—are "Arabs" in the cultural sense only; ethnically, they are direct-line descendants of the original, multi-racial inhabitants of Palestine: original in the sense of having lived there for untold centuries before the appearance of the Hebrews.

I may be forgiven for this historical digression, for I am convinced that it is extremely relevant in the context of the question as to who are the "rightful" inhabitants of Palestine and therefore, historically speaking, the "rightful" guardians of its holy places and, in particular, of Jerusalem. But this historical aspect touches upon only a fringe of our real problem: the problem of the community *morally and spiritually* able to safeguard the openness of Jerusalem to the followers of all the three monotheistic religions.

To my mind, the answer is clear: only the people who recognise *all* of the three monotheistic religions—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—as being based on a truly divine revelation; the people who

revere *all* the prophets of those three religions; the people who, by virtue of their own religious doctrine, are prohibited from and therefore utterly averse to reviling *anything* that is sacred to the two other faiths: only such people can be counted upon to safeguard the three-sided character of Jerusalem. A Jew of moral integrity may be tolerant enough not to *abuse* the names of Jesus and of Muhammad: but he will always regard them as "false prophets" and, therefore, not worthy of reverence. A Christian does certainly revere the memory of all the holy persons mentioned in the Old Testament: but he will not—and obviously cannot be expected to—extend the same reverence to the Qur'an and its Prophet. A Muslim, on the other hand, cannot and will not offend against any of the prophets of the two other faiths, since all of them are *his* prophets as well. The prophets of the Old Testament are sacred to him; and although he does not subscribe to the doctrine of God's incarnation in the person of Jesus, he sees in him one of the greatest apostles of God; and so he says: "We make no distinction between any of them."

In conclusion, I may state that since there is no political difference among the Muslim and Christian Palestinians, it follows that in a conceivably free Palestine—a state in which Jews, Christians and Muslims could live side by side in full political and cultural equality—the *Muslim* community should be specifically entrusted with the custody of Jerusalem as a city open to all three communities—and this in pursuance of the Qur'anic call to its followers to defend "monasteries and churches and synagogues and mosques, in [all of] which God's name is abundantly extolled" (*sūrah* 22:40). The all-embracing quality of the Islamic faith predisposes its followers for this sacred task: and it predisposes them in a deeper, more truly historic sense than could be attained by any resolution of the United Nations, or any fictitious claim based on what happened in Palestine two thousand years ago.

A VISION OF JERUSALEM

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A SHORT time ago I met by chance an old acquaintance from Switzerland, a fairly high functionary of the International Red Cross. He had just come back from Beirut, where he was helping the many injured, sick and hungry from among that city's Muslim population to adapt themselves to what promised to be a very shaky peace. While the three of us—he, my wife and myself—were sitting over cups of coffee, our friend described his recent experiences in Beirut, and particularly the last, terrible days of incessant Israeli bombardment of the city. And at the end he narrated to us a curious incident:

“When that last cease-fire became a fact and the constant booming of artillery shells and the ear-splitting explosions of bombs stopped, I had the same feeling as I experienced once in Central America after a volcanic eruption and an earthquake: an eerie silence—or something that seemed to be silence to ears too long accustomed to shattering noise. I walked through an utterly destroyed, torn-up street, on both sides a rubble of houses, twisted iron girders, broken furniture and indescribable heaps of rubbish; and over everything there floated a nauseating stench of decay. And then I noticed an old woman sitting on the ground, stony-faced and motionless. She looked at me but did not seem to see me, and stared unblinkingly ahead of her. I thought that she was wounded or ill, and asked her in my broken, rudimentary Arabic: ‘Can I help you? Can I do something for you?’ She appeared to focus her eyes on me but did not answer my question; instead, she nodded repeatedly and said: ‘They were fighting for Al-Quds . . .’”

At that point of his narrative our Swiss friend looked inquiringly

at me: "Al-Quds, I know, means Jerusalem in Arabic . . . but, Jerusalem—in Beirut? I cannot understand it to this day . . . Could she have meant the Palestinians? Of course, most of them were Muslims, but there were many Christians among them as well, and I know that Jerusalem is sacred to both of them. Or did she, perhaps, mean the Israelis, finding excuses for them in spite of her own hatred and desolation—in spite of herself? For she looked as if her words had been *forced* out of her . . ."

It is to resolve my friend's perplexity and to answer his question that I am writing these lines. As for myself, I have no doubt that the old woman had been referring to the Muslims, of whom she herself was obviously one, implying that they had been fighting for a cause that was sacred to them. But it is also possible that, without knowing it, she instinctively gave utterance to the historic truth that the fight in and around Beirut was, in a sense, a "fight for Jerusalem"—or, rather, on one side, for a justification of forcibly possessing it, and on the other, a fight for retaining at least the moral claim to its possession.

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There is no denying that Jerusalem is sacred to the followers of all the three monotheistic religions—Judaism, Christianity and Islam. But there is a marked difference in their considerations of the *reason* for this city's sacredness.

To the Jews, Jerusalem is, primarily, a symbol of their national past and their conviction of being "God's chosen people" by virtue of their descent from Abraham. Historically, it was the capital of the tiny kingdom which the Hebrews established in Palestine, through conquest, in the last millennium before the Christian era, and which, after a stormy independent or semi-independent existence of about five hundred years, they lost to the Romans nearly two thousand years ago. During most of the period of their independence, the Jews, bent upon securing and enlarging what they regarded as their "patrimony", almost incessantly waged war against the peoples and tribes around them; and whenever they were victorious they invariably, as the Bible tells us, destroyed the defeated enemy by fire and sword, killing indiscriminately all the men, women and children who fell into their hands, and even the enemy's "oxen, sheep and asses". And because all this was done on the grounds of their allegedly being "God's chosen people", the

Jews gradually acquired the habit of looking upon mankind's history with Jewish eyes alone: that is to say, they learned—and forever continued—to relate everything that happened in the world around them to themselves alone, with the rest of mankind being but a foil for the destinies of the "chosen people". Consequently, the narrative of the Old Testament—in the form in which it appears today—represents to the Jews almost exclusively a history of the Jewish people. It is this point of view which explains their peculiar, passionate attachment to Jerusalem as the "birthright" of the Children of Israel: in other words, it is not just a *religious* attachment but, rather, the outcome of a particular historical memory and, thus, of a people's narcissistic self-adoration.

To the Christians, on the other hand, Jerusalem has, apart from its Old Testament connotation, a genuine religious significance as the culminating point of the mission of Jesus and the place in which—according to Christian doctrine—he is said to have been crucified and where he was supposed to have been buried. In a sense, therefore, the Christians, too, look upon Jerusalem with the eyes of history: but because the events with which that historical memory is associated were of a spiritual and not of a racial or national import, Jerusalem appears to a Christian not as a "patrimony" but, rather, as something objectively holy, to be visited in pilgrimage or adored from afar. Not always, of course, from afar: for when, at the end of the eleventh century, the Christian nations of Europe set out on the first of their Crusades, their aim was to wrest Jerusalem—and the entire Holy Land with it—from the people whom they regarded as "heathen": in a word, to *possess* it. Still, the time of the Crusades belong to a faraway past, and no sensible Christian would today think of Jerusalem in terms of political possession or domination.

But what about the Muslims?

The Muslim attitude towards Jerusalem is at once ideological and historical: ideological, because it is based on the Qur'an; and historical, because it arises from the fact of *continuity* in mankind's religious experience, which is a basic tenet of the Islamic faith; and, specifically, from the fact that most of the prophets revered as such by the Muslims lived and died in Palestine, the focal point of which is, of course, Jerusalem. All these elements have been clearly alluded to in the first verse of the seventeenth *sūrah* of the Qur'an:

“Limitless in His glory is He who transported His servant [Muḥammad] by night from the Inviolable House of Worship [at Mecca] to the Remote House of Worship [at Jerusalem], the environs of which We had blessed.”

This Qur’anic reference to the Prophet Muḥammad’s mystic experience of the “Night Journey” to Jerusalem and his subsequent “Ascension” to heaven expresses the inner connection between the message enunciated by him and the messages voiced by the earlier prophets, the names of most of whom appear already in the Bible. “The Remote [lit., “the farthest”, *al-aqsā*] House of Worship [*masjid*]” is obviously the Temple of Solomon—or, to phrase it more accurately, its site. Now Solomon, whom the Jews regarded as no more than a king, albeit a very successful and glorious king, is—like his father David—revered by the Muslims as being one of the long line of God-inspired Hebrew prophets, beginning with Abraham and ending with Jesus; and because, according to the Qur’ān, so many prophets had lived in the land surrounding the site on which Solomon built his Temple, it is described in the Qur’ān-verse quoted above as “blessed by God”.

This is also the reason why, ever since the beginning of the Islamic period, the Arabic name for Jerusalem has been *Al-Bayt al-Muqaddas*, “The Sacred House”, or, simply, *Al-Quds*, “Sacredness”; and why the Muslims revere it, next to Mecca and Medina, as one of their three holy cities.

It is obvious, therefore, that the Muslim attitude towards Jerusalem (and, of course, Palestine as a whole) has nothing to do with an “ancestral” title to its possession. No Muslim claims descent from Solomon, the builder of what to the Arabs at the time of the Qur’anic revelation was “The Remote House of Worship”: but every Muslim reveres the memory of Solomon as a *prophet*. Similarly, although about a half of all Arabian tribes—and among them the tribe to which the Prophet Muḥammad belonged—regard Solomon’s ancestor Abraham as their ancestor as well, no Muslim attributes to this *race*-relationship any intrinsic importance. Contrary to the Jews, who venerate Abraham primarily as their “patriarch”, that is to say, as one of the progenitors of their race, to the Muslims his memory is sacred on purely religious grounds: it is sacred because Abraham was one of the most sublime of God’s apostles, the man who—as the Qur’ān so graphically describes it in the sixth

sūrah—attained to inner illumination and an instinctive insight into the truth of God’s oneness and uniqueness without any external guidance: the prototype of the God-seeker who reaches his goal because his heart and mind drive him to it.

Hence, it is not difficult to understand why the Prophet Muḥammad, while in Mecca during the early years of his mission, used to turn his face towards Jerusalem whenever he prayed. To him, as to every Muslim after him, Jerusalem was a sacred place; and it remained sacred even after the Qur’anic revelation which, years later, established the Ka’bah in Mecca (described as “The Inviolable House of Worship”) as the direction towards which the followers of the Qur’ān should turn their faces in prayer. And the sacredness of Jerusalem was further accentuated by the Qur’anic reference to it as the goal of the Prophet’s mystic “Night Journey” and the starting-point of his tremendous spiritual experience of Ascension: for—as the Prophet himself narrated it afterwards—it was in Jerusalem, after his “Night Journey”, that he saw himself leading a prayer in Solomon’s Temple (which had been razed to the ground nearly a thousand years before that time), with the congregation consisting of all the prophets who preceded him in time: a symbolic illustration, no doubt, of the Qur’anic doctrine that the message conveyed to the Prophet Muḥammad is not a “new” religion, but a culminating point and a conclusion of God’s revelation to man.

No wonder, then, that when Jerusalem was conquered by the Arabs in the seventh century of the Christian era, the city was treated by its Muslim conquerors with all the reverence due to its religious status. By then, there was no Jewish population there: the last Jews had been expelled by the Romans centuries earlier. But the Christian inhabitants of the city were granted by the Arabs an assurance of full security for their lives, their property and their places of worship: in short, a true covenant of peace and protection. Consequently, after the Muslim conquest of Jerusalem no church was converted into a mosque; and wherever a new mosque was built, the Muslim administrators took care not to encroach upon the rights of the indigenous communities; and when it was decided to build a great new mosque in Jerusalem, every precaution was taken not to erect the building on a place already occupied by another house of worship. Now Solomon’s Temple had been destroyed by the Babylonians in the sixth century B.C., and its

successor—the temple built by Herod the Great at the beginning of the Christian era—had been turned into a heap of rubble by the soldiers of Titus in the year 70 of that era; and so, the great mosque—ever since known by the Qur'anic name of *Al-Masjid al-Aqsā*—was built on that empty but sacred place, in commemoration of the first verse of the seventeenth *sūrah* and, thus, of all the prophets who preceded the last one, through whom the Qur'ān was revealed.

Throughout the centuries that followed, with an interruption of less than a hundred years caused by the Crusades and the Frankish occupation of Palestine, the Qur'anic doctrine of mankind's religious continuity was the basis for all social life in the Holy Land. Under Muslim rule, the sacredness of Jerusalem was expressed in its openness to the followers of all three monotheistic religions. The existing Christian churches and monasteries of all denominations were protected, and many more were gradually built. The few Jews who had gradually returned had no temple of their own because they believed that only the Messiah who, according to their creed, would appear at the end of time would be entitled to rebuild the destroyed Temple of Solomon and restore it to its ancient glory; but none the less they had their own houses of prayer and were free to worship in front of the last remainder of the Herodian Temple, the so-called Wailing Wall, which the Muslims had left untouched. And as the centuries came and went, pilgrims from all the three communities freely mingled in the ancient streets of Al-Quds, the city that was holy to all of them.

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And then came the establishment of Israel, and two decades later the war of 1967, in the course of which the Israelis gained physical possession of the Old City of Jerusalem. This did not, theoretically, signify any change in the sacredness of the Holy City. As in past centuries, Christian pilgrims continued to flock to Jerusalem and the other shrines connected with the memory of Jesus. Muslim pilgrims, too, could—in theory—visit all the places which so vividly recalled to them most of the prophets mentioned in the Qur'ān and, naturally enough, the Last Prophet, Muḥammad, whose deep, mystic experiences preceding his Ascension were so intimately bound up with “The Remote House of Worship” in Jerusalem. In practice, however, Muslim pilgrims were and are to this day not en-

couraged to visit the land which all of them still call “Palestine”: for the simple reason that they still insist on regarding Jerusalem as a *universal* Holy City, whereas the Israeli parliament has years ago declared that no part of the—now forcibly reunited—city of Jerusalem would ever be returned to the Arabs, and that the city as a whole would “forever remain the eternal capital of the State of Israel”. This undisguised return to the Old Testament conception of Jerusalem as the exclusive patrimony of the Jewish people betrays, of course, a total disregard of a most important lesson of history and philosophy: the lesson that in human affairs there is no such thing as “never” or “always” or “forever”, and that eternity is an attribute of God alone.

The very name of the ancient city of Al-Quds—“The Holy”—implies that it cannot be considered a “patrimony” or a “birth-right” of this or that nation and certainly not a piece of real estate to be “possessed” by any one group of people. It belongs to all who mentally approach it with a humility born of faith in the One God, and particularly to those who, in the words of the Qur'ān, “believe in *all* His apostles, making no distinction between any of them”.

But since Jerusalem is universal in its religious significance and cannot, therefore, be conceded as a “patrimony” to any one nation, is it not probable that its political destiny, too, will not be decided in the city itself, but elsewhere?—not in and by an Israeli parliament but in a far wider arena?

Was this, perhaps, the meaning of the visionary words which that old woman, sitting amidst the ruins of Beirut, spoke in the hearing of my Swiss friend: “They were fighting for Al-Quds . . .”?

THE MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE *HIJRAH*

(London, November 1979)

IN ITS primary, general meaning the term *hijrah* denotes a person's or a social group's migration from one physical environment or place to another, with the linguistic stress on the act of leaving the former in the hope of reaching a place or environment thought to be more conducive to the moral and material well-being of the person or group concerned. Hence, it would seem that the Latin noun *exodus*—which has precisely this connotation and is, moreover, fully incorporated as such in the linguistic usage of the Occident owing to its Biblical associations—represents the closest possible rendering of the Arabic word *hijrah* into any Western language.

This definition of the term *hijrah* should be kept in mind whenever we use it to describe the exodus of the Prophet Muḥammad and his Companions from Mecca to Medina: for this exodus, taking place as it did after thirteen years of bitter persecution of the Prophet and his followers by their pagan compatriots in Mecca, was undertaken in the fervent hope that the city of Medina—or, rather, Yathrib, as it was called in those days—would provide a fertile soil for the spread of the religion based on the Qur'ān and preached by the Prophet Muḥammad: the religion of Islam.

Thus, the *hijrah* of the Prophet, which took place in the year 622 of the Christian era, was most prominently characterised by the positive, selfless expectation of a moral good to come which inspired the Prophet and his followers, and the conviction fully expressed in the Prophet's prayer on leaving Mecca, the place of his birth: "O God! Thou hast ordained that I should leave the place which I loved: guide me, then, unto a place which is beloved by

Thee!" And so the Prophet set out on his long journey to Yathrib, which in the course of time came to be known as *Madīnat an-Nabī*, "The City of the Prophet", or, more concisely, *Al-Madīnah*, "The City".

Keeping all this in mind, one realises that to refer to the Prophet's *hijrah* as a "flight", as is so often done by Occidental, non-Muslim writers, is not only erroneous from the linguistic point of view, but also contradicts the innermost purport and the historic significance of an occurrence which ushered in an entirely new era in the history of mankind.

In order to understand this fully, we must look back at the period which immediately preceded the Prophet's *hijrah*: namely, the first thirteen years of his apostolic mission—the years which historians describe as the "Mecca period". During those thirteen years, beginning with the revelation of the first five verses of the ninety-sixth *sūrah* of the Qur'ān, almost all of the gradually unfolding revelation was directed towards purely spiritual ends: that is to say, matters of worldly concern (except such as were closely related to social ethics) remained untouched for the time being, and the main accent lay on the inculcation of a truly religious spirit in the believers. The development of moral consciousness; the cognition of man's responsibility to and ultimate judgment by God, the One, the Unique, the All-Knowing; kindness and compassion towards all living beings; patience in adversity and the overcoming of the fear of death: these are some of the elements predominantly stressed in the step-by-step revelations vouchsafed to the Prophet Muḥammad throughout the thirteen years of the Mecca period. They supplied the basis, the spiritual matrix, as it were, of all the social teachings of the Qur'ān that were yet to come—thus anticipating the (much later) Qur'anic dictum that "verily, God does not change a people's condition unless they change their inner selves".

As already mentioned, this spiritual change in the followers of the Prophet Muḥammad expressed itself most clearly in their perception of God's oneness and uniqueness and, consequently, in their uncompromising rejection of every concept, imagery and usage which contradicted this basic perception. In social terms, therefore, the attitude of the new religious community was diametrically opposed to all the traditions which formed and characterised the much larger pagan society of Mecca at the beginning of the seventh century of the Christian era. The whole concept of that

pre-Islamic Meccan society revolved around a multiplicity of deities and idols, some of them of a purely tribal import—that is to say, worshipped only by the people living in and around Mecca—while others enjoyed a wider adherence, with a worship spread over most of the Arabian Peninsula and permeating every manifestation of social life. Although almost all the pagan Arabs at that time seemed to have been vaguely agreed upon the idea of a supreme, invisible God supposed to be ruling over the multitude of the other deities (many of them represented by idols carved of stone or wood, by trees, rocks, and all manner of fetishes), they were convinced that this Supreme God could be approached by man only through the mediation of certain female deities and angels, all of them regarded as "God's daughters". A direct approach to Him was considered unthinkable. A call like that of the Prophet Muḥammad, who from the very beginning spoke of God as the One besides whom there is no other deity, the All-Knowing who is aware of what is in the hearts of man and, therefore, needs no mediator between Himself and any of His creatures, appeared to them as bordering on madness. Moreover, the Prophet's emphatic negation of the *existence* of the various deities to whose worship the Meccans were devoted implied also a rejection of the many ceremonies and tribal usages connected with that worship: in short, it threatened the—to them—time-honoured structure of Arabia's pagan society. The fact that the Prophet's followers were only a small minority in the midst of a large pagan population, as well as the fact that this small minority was not in the least aggressive and asked for no more than to be allowed to live quietly in accordance with their religious beliefs, made no difference to the Meccans. They felt acutely offended and morally threatened by the crass disregard of their tribal traditions by a group of people who openly refused to conform to their ancestral beliefs, and whose example seemed to be highly infectious among what was regarded as the "lower strata" of Meccan society.

It is, therefore, not surprising that the preaching of the Prophet Muḥammad met with hostility on the part of most of his compatriots; and when it became obvious to them that he was not prepared to compromise on his ethical principles, the hostility of the pagan Meccans began to express itself in active persecution of the new religious community. In the course of the years, this persecution became more and more virulent, gradually leading to

The Meaning and Significance of the Hijrah

physical torture and eventually to the martyrdom of several of the Prophet's followers.

And so, after several unsuccessful attempts to find support in the mountain town of Taif, and after having received a number of delegations from the citizens of Yathrib inviting him and his community to make their home there, the Prophet enjoined upon all his followers to emigrate with him* to the city which was to become the home of Islam in an entirely new aspect: the home of a community which had become fully mature under the stress of persecution and was now ready to assume the dynamic role envisaged for it in the Qur'ān.

Thus, the *hijrah* of the Prophet from Mecca to Medina—as Yathrib soon came to be known—constitutes a clearly-marked watershed between two periods of early Islam: the period of spiritual preparation in Mecca, and the period of socio-political growth and organisation in Medina. But however distinct from one another both these periods may have been, they are closely inter-linked and form, in reality, one unbroken whole—so much so that neither can be fully understood without taking the other into account. Without the spiritual preparation during the thirteen years at Mecca, the subsequent social development of the Muslim community, its growth into statehood, and its very dynamism and expansion would have been unthinkable; and without the dynamism and socio-political development at Medina, the Prophet's preaching at Mecca would have remained barren of its historic achievement. Hence, it was in the Prophet's *hijrah* that Islam took the decisive step towards its inner and outer fulfilment.

The Prophet's Companions were fully aware of this fact. When the second Caliph, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, decided upon the establishment of a purely Islamic calendar, he designated—with the consent of all the leaders of the Muslim community—not the year in which the revelation of the Qur'ān began, but rather the year in which the *hijrah* took place, as Year One of the Islamic reckoning.

* The Prophet, accompanied by the future first Caliph, Abū Bakr, was the last to leave Mecca.

THE MESSAGE OF THE QUR'ĀN

(Address delivered at a Conference of the Islamic Council,
London, April 1980)

SOME WEEKS ago, my brother Salem Azzam,* who is ultimately responsible for this Conference, suggested to me that "The Message of the Qur'ān" should be the subject of my talk on this occasion. I must confess that at first I was somewhat taken aback by this request—for the simple reason that "The Message of the Qur'ān" is the title of my translation of and commentary on the Holy Qur'ān which has just been published after more than seventeen years of labour. Since this work consists of about 1000 printed pages, it seemed to me that I could not profitably add anything to it within the limited compass of a talk such as the present one. However, on receiving several pressing telegrams from my brother Salem, it occurred to me that his request was, after all, not as misplaced as I had thought at first. Granted that I had worked for many years on the subject of the Qur'ānic message—but had my poor endeavours really exhausted all the depths of the Holy Book? Certainly not. Neither my own approach to it, nor the commentaries produced by the greatest scholars of the Muslim past, could ever claim to have "exhausted" something that is utterly inexhaustible by virtue of the fact that it represents God's ultimate Message to man. For does not the Qur'ān itself declare:

"Say: 'If all the sea were ink for my Sustainer's words—the sea would indeed be exhausted ere my Sustainer's words are exhausted'" (*sūrah* 18:109).

And so, despite my just having published 1000 pages on "The Message of the Qur'ān", I now stand before you ready to offer a few more thoughts on one or two particular aspects of this eternal, inexhaustible subject.

* Secretary-General of the Islamic Council.

First of all, let us consider a problem of form and method: Why is it that God's final message to man was revealed in the Arabic language and was conveyed to mankind through a son of Arabia, the Last Prophet, Muḥammad? Is it not a fact that at the time of the revelation of the Qur'ān there existed far higher civilisations than the one evident in Arabia? We have only to think of the great civilisations of China or India, or those of Byzantium or Iran, all of which were certainly superior, in respect of accumulated philosophic thought and knowledge and of scientific achievement, to anything which existed in Arabia in the seventh century of the Christian era. Why, then, did God in His unfathomable wisdom choose Arabia to be the scene, and the Arabic language the vehicle, and an Arabian Prophet the bearer of His final revelation?

None of us can, of course, pretend to grasp the "how" and the "why" of God's creative Will. To claim such an ability would in itself be a blasphemy. Nevertheless, God has endowed us human beings with reason, and has willed that we should use that reason: more than that—He has dedicated the Holy Qur'ān itself "to people who think": and so I shall endeavour, in all humility, to try to explain to myself and to you the role of Arabia and the Arabic language in connection with the revelation of God's eternal Word.

It seems to me that the basic element for our understanding of this historic phenomenon is closely connected with an understanding of the quality of the *people* among whom and to whom the Qur'ān was first revealed.

It was in Arabia, long before the advent of the Prophet Muḥammad, that a historically unique type of man and society had come into being: a society differentiated from all other groupments not so much by racial peculiarities as by a special *life-sense* all its own, and thus by a special mode of perception, insight and feeling not encountered in any other society or type of man. I am referring to the *bedouin* way of life and feeling as well as to the ethical concepts peculiar to bedouin culture.

In this connection, it must be understood that when I speak of the "bedouin", I comprise within this term *all* the Arabian societies—both the nomadic and the settled ones—of pre-Islamic and early Islamic times: for, whether nomad or settled, no person in that early period could rightly claim to be an "Arab" unless he belonged to a tribal, bedouin groupment and could trace his physical descent from a tribal ancestor. In that sense, the urban societies

of Mecca, Taif or Medina were no less representative of bedouin culture than any of the countless nomad or semi-nomad tribes inhabiting the rest of the Arabian Peninsula.

Now this Arabian, bedouin culture was not only a historical-geographic phenomenon: more than anything else, it was the social environment—the cradle, as it were—of the earliest-known formulation of the spiritual attitude described as *monotheism*. Historically, this attitude first manifested itself among the early Hebrews. Contrary to what their latter-day descendants might claim, those early Hebrews were but a small bedouin tribe that had migrated from Arabia northwards to Babylonia, then to Syria, and finally to Palestine, and in the course of time lost all contact with its Arabian roots. It was many centuries later that another, much wider spiritual movement based on the concept of God's oneness and uniqueness came to full fruition in Arabia and gradually extended its influence, as a religion and a civilisation, over a large part of the globe: the religion of Islam and Muslim civilisation.

Arabia, then, was the earliest historically-established home of monotheism: and it became its home by virtue of the kind of life which its geography and its climate forced upon its children, the bedouin.

The physical nature of Arabia is harsh and hard, the landscape barren and its solitude immense. Faced by a life devoid of all softness and ease, always exposed to the dangers of the desert, to thirst and often to hunger, always struggling for survival, but always conscious of freedom within the limitless expanses of earth and sky, the bedouin was from his earliest childhood aware of the insignificance of his own life and, at the same time, of the infinity and the all-embracing greatness of the nature which manifested itself in the majestic, unchanging rhythm of alternating days and nights, of life and death, of heat and cold, of rainfall and the birth of plants, of withering-away and re-birth after another of the rare days of rainfall: and from all this there was only one single step to the concept and the awareness of a Supreme Being above all the reality open to man's sensual perception. Despite all the aberrations of pre-Islamic Arabian thought—aberrations of ancient Arabian folklore and Arabian polytheism—the consciousness of the existence of that Supreme Being was never really absent from the bedouin mind, and this consciousness was at the root of the strongly developed, very definite code of ethics with which bedouin society was

imbued. Individual dignity, pride and courage, the necessity—not always observed in practice but always regarded as supremely right—of subordinating one's personal interests to the common good of the tribe or clan: all this found an abiding expression in the concept of *ḥamāsah*, which in the Arabian mind circumscribed one's ability to be fired with enthusiasm for a noble, extra-personal cause. Allied to this was the outstanding virtue of hospitality (*ḍi-yāfah*), which became and forever remained connected with the image of Arabian life; and the concept of hospitality found its apogee in the bedouin readiness to grant asylum (*malja'*) to anyone fleeing from persecution or oppression. And, finally, there stood out in the bedouin code of ethics the ideal of *muruwwah*—that untranslatable word which comprises a whole complex of virtues embracing all good and praiseworthy traits, like sense of honour, truthfulness, generosity, valour, kindness and chivalry towards the weak, outspokenness towards the strong, and courtesy towards all.

To be sure, Arabian life did not always conform to these virtues and ethical demands: it was a life full of contradictions, of internecine wars and feuds and all kinds of deeds of violence side by side with outstanding acts of kindness and selfless generosity: but the ideals of which I have just spoken always remained alive in the bedouin mind, and even when one fell short of the ideal, its validity was never contested.

All this must be remembered if we are truly to understand the early history of Islam.

When the Arabian Prophet, Muḥammad, began to proclaim God's Message to his compatriots in Mecca, he was at first faced with astonishment and then by hostility in view of the relentless rejection of all forms of polytheism expressed in the Qur'anic revelation. Although the people of Mecca were an urban community, they had, as we have seen, preserved all bedouin characteristics and values. Tribal traditions were all-important to them—and among those traditions was the belief in a multiplicity of deities and sub-deities, which the preaching of the Prophet now bade them to abandon: and so—although they fully realised that he himself embodied all the virtues which, in the Arabian view, made a person truly superior—the people of Mecca bitterly opposed him for a number of years and in the course of time forced him and his followers to migrate to Medina. But how did it happen that after less

than a decade of intermittent warfare all antagonism to Islam disappeared in Arabia, and its people became the torch-bearers of the Islamic message?

To my mind, the answer is simple: as soon as the first shock of the Qur'anic idea of God's oneness and uniqueness was absorbed by the—until then—polytheistic Arabs, they began to realise that, after all, that idea was not entirely foreign to them. They remembered that they, too, had always believed in the existence of a Supreme Being above the multitude of their gods and goddesses; and as soon as they accepted the idea that this Supreme Being—God—is omnipotent and omniscient, they realised that those "lesser" deities were unnecessary and, therefore, unreal; and since they were unreal, they could be entirely rejected without any further ado. And so the erstwhile polytheists returned to the original bedouin perception of the One, the Creator above and behind all manifestations of His creation, the Infinite and Eternal who causes day and night to alternate, who grants life and deals death, who causes rain to fall and gives birth to all living beings, and causes them to wither away and then to be re-born . . .

When they heard the message of the Qur'ān from the lips of God's Apostle, the Arabs recognised in it their own ancient valuation or right and wrong. In the teachings of the Qur'ān they heard a loud and clear enunciation of what they themselves had in the past dimly believed to be true. Without mentioning the word *muruwwah*, the Qur'ān explicitly set forth the ideals vaguely contained in that concept, demanding of man that he uphold the truth and condemn all that is false, that he show mercy to all living beings and stand up with courage to the forces of evil, and that he bow down before none but God.

Thus, after an initial shock, the message of the Qur'ān found a ready echo in the minds and hearts of the Prophet's Arabian contemporaries, who recognised it as something of which they had always been subconsciously aware. In other words, God chose as the recipients of His final message to mankind the one people who were psychologically prepared for it, and whose language possessed that richness of vocabulary, that flexibility of syntax, and that precision of expression which could bring God's Word to man's understanding.

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And now let us turn to the central idea of the message of the Qur'ān, which has been summed up in the 112th *sūrah*:

“Say: ‘He is the One God—
God, the Eternal, Uncaused Cause of All That Exists.
He begets not, and neither is He begotten;
and there is nothing that could be compared with Him.’”

Now the innermost meaning of *ṣamad*, which occurs in the Qur'ān only in this one instance, and which I have translated as “the Eternal, Uncaused Cause of All that Exists”, is God’s quality of absolute existence without beginning and without end, with the further implication that everything that exists or could exist is dependent on Him for its coming into being and its continuation. The fact that God is uncaused (or “not begotten”, in Qur’anic terminology) finds its correlate in the fact that He cannot be *succeeded* by anything (or, as the Qur’ān phrases it, that “He begets not”); and this absolute uniqueness is fully expressed in the statement that “there is nothing that could be compared with Him”—in other words, that there is no possibility of ever defining or even imagining Him.

The Prophet himself described this short *sūrah* as equivalent to one-third of the whole of the Qur’ān—the conceptual beginning and end, as it were, of its entire message.

But one might ask oneself: Why is this idea of God’s oneness and uniqueness so many times, and in so many varying formulations, repeated throughout the Holy Book? What is the purpose of God’s demand that man should always be conscious of the Creator’s oneness, and why is any deviation from this principle described in the Qur’ān as an unforgivable sin?

Since God is self-sufficient and, therefore, does not *need* man’s recognition of His oneness, it is obvious that the purpose of this Qur’anic postulate is connected with *human* needs: in other words, it is conceived for *man’s* benefit alone.

It is meant, firstly, to free man from superstitious feelings of dependence on all sorts of imaginary powers or forces of nature, and to bring home to him that he depends exclusively on, and is responsible to, the one and only Power that is *real* in the deepest sense of this word: and the consciousness of being responsible to none but this Ultimate Reality—*al-ḥaqq* in Qur’anic terminology—endows

the human being with a dignity and a freedom from all manner of superstitions which no other concept could confer on him. And because God is the Uncaused Cause of all that exists, and therefore omnipresent, omniscient and all-embracing in His wisdom, man can be sure that at the moment of judgment not only his outward actions but also his innermost feelings and urges will be justly, and without any arbitrariness, taken into account by Him who has created man as he is: a frail being, always liable to err, and therefore always in need of divine guidance.

Furthermore, the concept of God’s oneness and uniqueness leads of necessity to the conclusion that this unity must be reflected in His creation as well: in other words, that a unity of purpose underlies the divine act of creation—or, to phrase it more concisely, that there exists a definite *purpose* in the universe as such. Hence the Qur’anic statements:

“We have not created heaven and earth and all that is between them without meaning and purpose, as is the surmise of those who are bent on denying the truth (*sūrah* 38:27)”;

or:

“None of this has God created without [an inner] truth” (*sūrah* 10:5)

i.e., without endowing it *a priori* with an inner truth—implying that everything in the universe, whether concrete or abstract, is meaningful and not “accidental”. The fact that we human beings are not in a position to grasp this ultimate meaning and purpose does not detract anything from the finding that there *must* be a meaning and a purpose in God’s creation, and therefore in human life as well: and this finding is another of the immense benefits which the cognition of God’s oneness and uniqueness confers upon man.

Nor is this all. Since, as we have seen, there must be a meaning and a purpose in the creation of the universe, there can be no *inherent* contradiction between its various manifestations despite all appearances to the contrary: that is to say, despite all the conflicts, collisions and even cruelties evident in all forms of life in the universe, we must conclude that what appears to us as contradictions are but various phases, fragmentarily perceived by our inadequate mental apparatus, of a God-willed unity of meaning and purpose—a unity which at present is beyond our comprehension

but which may be revealed to us in the life to come.

This leads us to a further conclusion. Since there can be no inherent contradiction between the various elements and phases of the universe as such, there cannot possibly be any contradiction between any of the basic, natural aspects of individual human existence. Hence, there is no inherent conflict between the physical and the spiritual elements of human life: the needs of the spirit and the urges of the body are but twin, God-willed aspects of the human personality as such. Both are natural, and therefore legitimate; but, on the other hand, neither of these two aspects must be allowed to dominate man's life to the exclusion of the other: both must be coordinated and harmonised by our moral will in such a way that the fact of their constituting a coherent, integral whole might reflect the concept of the Creator's transcendental oneness in the ephemeral phenomena of our human lives.

In pursuance of our consideration of the finding that there cannot possibly be any inherent contradiction between the two main aspects of individual human life, we arrive of necessity at the conclusion that man's *social life* as well must be capable of a similar harmonisation; in other words, it must be so arranged as to exclude, as far as is humanly possible, all tendency towards tensions and conflicts between its individual members: that is to say, the possibility of one person's exploitation or oppression by another must be reduced to a humanly achievable minimum. To this end, the message of the Qur'ān makes it clear that there is no room in an Islamic society for the concept of "class", just as there is no room in it for the idea that any one individual could be inherently superior to another by virtue of his birth or social function. Thus, the achievement of social justice and brotherhood is an absolute, unavoidable concomitant of the Islamic belief in the oneness of God and of the purposefulness of His creative Will.

And here, I believe, we have an answer to the question as to why the idea of God's oneness and uniqueness is so many times repeated in the Qur'ān, and why its cognition has been made the cardinal, supreme postulate in His final message to man.

By declaring and repeatedly stressing His Own oneness and uniqueness, God confers a threefold benefit upon man: He endows him with spiritual dignity and freedom and gives him the conviction that all creation, and therefore human life as well, is not an outcome of a play of blind forces, but has a definite meaning and a defi-

nite purpose—a cognition which enables man to be at peace with his own destiny and, thus, with God. Furthermore, man is made to realise that there is no inherent contradiction between the physical and the spiritual aspects of his own life—and so he is enabled to achieve peace within himself. And, thirdly, he is made truly aware that it is virtue alone and not birth or social function which makes one person superior to another, and that our endeavour to achieve social justice must be a reflection, however pale and inadequate, of the absolute, transcendental justice inherent in the concept of God's uniqueness of wisdom. And, finally, even as in our individual lives we are called upon to keep a just balance between extremes, rejecting both licentiousness and exaggerated self-denial, we are reminded that, in order to be Islamic, our social life, too, must be subordinated to the principle of moderation and equity, a just balance between what is due and necessary to oneself and what is due to others: and thus the individual is shown a way to attaining to abiding peace with his fellow-men.

This threefold message of truth and peace—man's peace with God, peace within himself and peace with his social environment—is summarised, as it were, in these words of the Qur'ān:

“Thus have We willed you to be a community of the middle way, so that you might bear witness to the truth before all mankind, and that the Apostle might bear witness to it before you” (*sūrah* 2:143).